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GHOSTHUNTER'S
VERY FIRST CASE
NEARLY PROVED TO
BE HIS LAST...

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CALLING TIME ON A PAIR
OF PUB HAUNTINGS

THE HAUNTED GOGGLEBOX

THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF
PARANORMAL TELEVISION

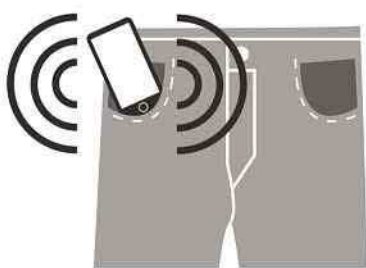


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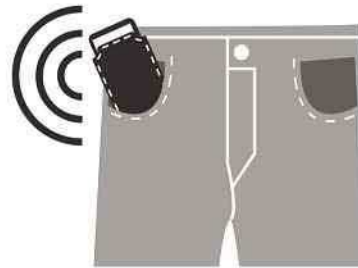


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FORTEAN TIMES is produced for Dennis Publishing by Wild Talents Ltd. Postal address: Fortean Times, PO BOX 71602, London E17 0QD.

You can manage your existing subscription through <http://www.subsinfo.co.uk/> – this should be your first port of call if you have any queries about your subscription.

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USA & Canada subscriptions: (+1) 800-428-3003 (toll free)

Fax (+1) 757-428-6253 email cs@imsnews.com

Other overseas subscriptions: +44 (0)1795 592 909

Fax: +44 (0)1795 414 555

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www.forteantimes.com



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PUBLISHED BY
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30 Cleveland Street
London W1T 4JD, UK
Tel: 020 7907 6000

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020 7907 6000

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PRINTED BY POLESTAR BICESTER

DISTRIBUTION

Distributed in UK, Ireland and worldwide

by Seymour Distribution Ltd.

2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT

Tel: 020 7429 4000 / Fax: 020 7429 4001

Queries on overseas availability should be emailed to info@seymour.co.uk

Speciality store distribution by Worldwide Magazine Distribution Ltd, Tel: 0121 788 3112 Fax: 0121 788 1272

STANDARD SUBSCRIPTION RATES

12 issues: UK £39.98; EU £47.50

Fortean Times (USPS 023-226) is published every four weeks by Dennis Publishing Ltd, 30 Cleveland Street, London, W1P 4JD, United Kingdom. The US annual subscription price is \$89.99.

Airfreight and mailing in the USA is by Agent named Air Business, C/O Worldnet Shipping USA Inc., 149-35 177th Street, Jamaica, New York, 11434.

Periodical postage paid at Jamaica, NY 11431, USA.

US Postmaster: Send address changes to: Fortean Times, 3330 Pacific Avenue, Suite 500, Virginia Beach, VA, 23451-2983, USA.

REST OF THE WORLD £55; US \$89.99 (\$161.98 for 24 issues)

DENNIS PUBLISHING LIMITED

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ABC Member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations. Circulation 14,320 (Jan-Dec 2015)

Printed in the UK. ISSN: 0308 5899
© Fortean Times: JUNE 2016

editorial

Ghosts, busted?

As Stu Neville points out in his Forum piece this issue (p54), media interest in fortan phenomena tends to move in cycles. Many readers will recall the X-Files-fuelled UFO frenzy of the 1990s, when alien imagery was ubiquitous, people were abducted on a daily basis, governments covered up crash saucer retrievals and UFO witnesses received regular visits from the notorious Men in Black (see p29 for some British encounters with these dark-suited oddballs from the files of our own Jenny Randles).

Despite the impending arrival of a very belated follow-up to the 1996 alien invasion flick *Independence Day* (which, of course, featured Hollywood conspiracy nut Randy Quaid, whose 'Star Whacker' theory was laid out in FT340:32-37), the mainstream media seems to have lost any vestige of interest in the mythos that obsessed them, and us, for much of the second half of the 20th century. Perhaps it's because, as Peter Brookesmith argues in his new 'Flying Sorcery' column (p28), ufology itself has devolved into, on the one hand, a form of highly specialised 'stamp collecting' and on the other into an endless online war in which the same old cases are fought over again and again, with neither side prepared to cede an inch; both tendencies, one suspects, act as a strong deterrent to the media or the general public taking any interest in the subject these days (although, one might argue, per Chris Saunders's article on Chinese ufology in FT331:28-33, that this is only true in the jaded, post-modern West).

Since the dawn of the 21st century, the gap left by the departure of the little green men appears to have been filled by the, perhaps surprising, reappearance of the pre-scientific and reassuringly traditional figure (if we can apply the term to something in every sense so amorphous) of the ghost. The huge success of television programmes like *Most Haunted* and its myriad knock-offs, as well as the rise of ghost hunting as a hobby seen over the last decade and a half, have been striking. While the cable TV schedules – as Mr Neville points out – seem currently to favour large hairy men in search of large hairy creatures, the cinema continues to offer us such spectral fare as *The Conjuring 2* and the controversial (yes, it's got women in it) *Ghostbusters* remake.

Going with the ghostly flow, we feature a number of haunting tales this issue. Alan Murdie looks back at ghost hunter Andrew Green's first case, one that haunted him, one might say, for the rest of his life (p30); SD Tucker ponders the phenomenon of spook-infested chimneys (p36); and Robert Halliday (p42) and Tom Licence (p48) take a closer look at a pair of classic pub hauntings to see what they can tell us about the genesis and persistence of a type of fortan phenomenon

that has become part of everyday British culture.

Taking our research seriously, we popped into The Ostrich in Colnbrook for a pint and a chat with the venerable inn's current manager, Sarah Morgan, who shared her own stories with us. She and her colleagues have often witnessed coffee cups and wine glasses flying across the bar; apparently this is such a regular occurrence that no one bats an eyelid these days. Slightly more disturbing (particularly if you know the supposed backstory to the pub's haunting) is the smell of rotting flesh that moves around the upstairs flat. And one of the numerous séances that the inn has

hosted yielded an intriguing incident when a female participant saw her face in a mirror covered with burns and seemingly melting. She said she knew nothing of the pub's history – a claim that strikes us as exceedingly unlikely. As Sarah told us, everyone in the area knows the grisly story of the evil landlord Jarman and his booby-trapped bed that deposited his victims into a vat of boiling oil; she first heard it on a school trip! As Dr Tom Licence suggests in his article, such narratives – built up over time and ossified into tradition – may play a profound part in our experiences of the supernatural, both shaping and 'explaining' them.

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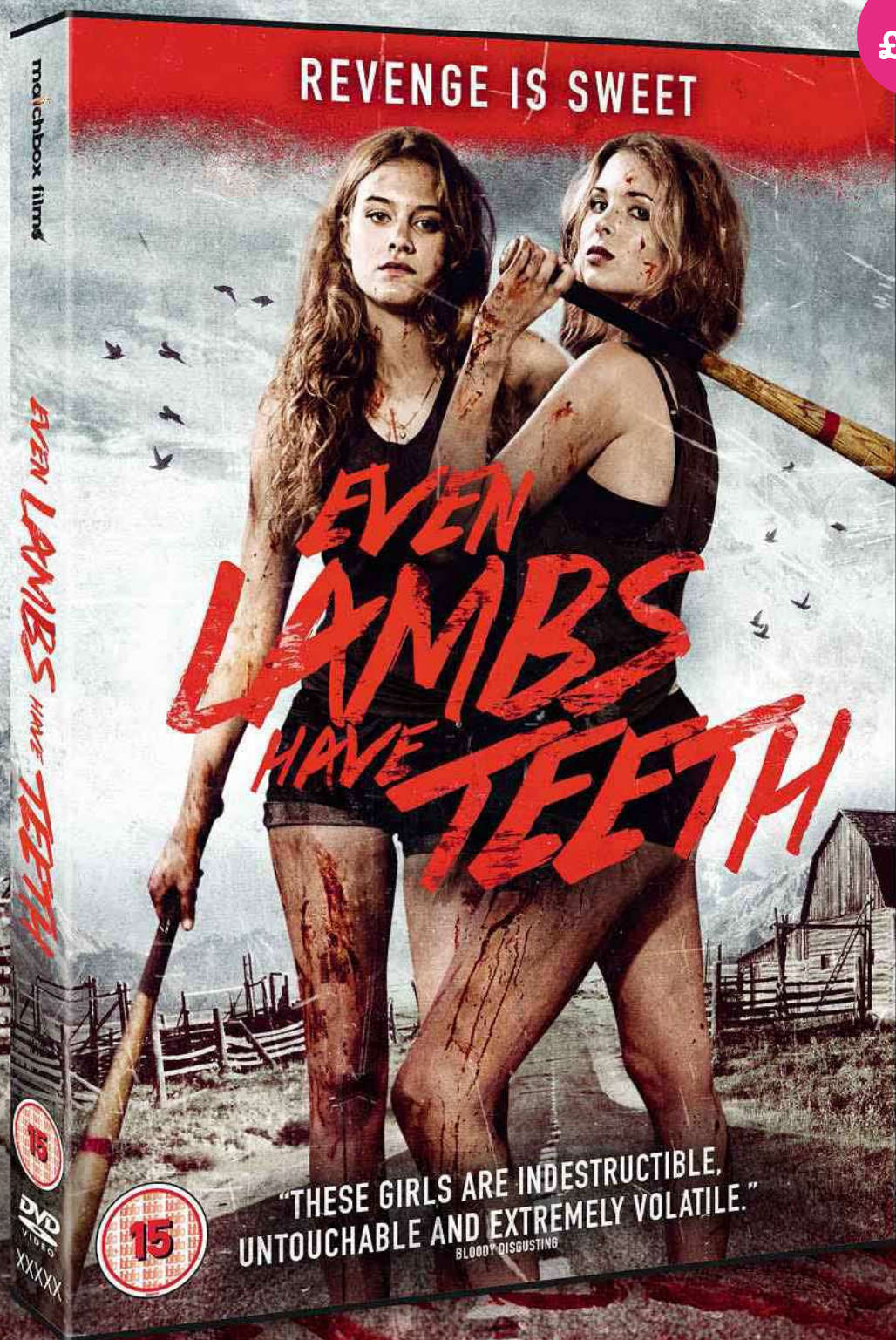
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

SEE PAGE 78

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Tall, dark and fearsome

'Old Stinker' roams the Yorkshire Wolds, plus the Werewolf of Worcester

Over the past few months, there have been at least seven reported sightings of an 8ft (2.4m) hairy creature around the Barmston Drain, a 23-mile (37km) -long water channel built in 1798 to dry out salt marshes, today an abandoned industrial area near the town of Beverley outside Hull in the East Riding of Yorkshire. One woman saw it from a bridge across the Drain last December. "It was standing upright one moment," she said. "The next it was down on all fours running like a dog. I was terrified. It bounded along on all fours, then stopped and reared up on to its back legs, before running down the embankment towards the water. It vaulted 30ft [9m] over to the other side and vanished up the embankment and over a wall into some allotments."

A couple said they saw "something tall and hairy" next to the Drain, apparently carrying a German shepherd dog in its jaws. They stopped to get a closer look and saw it jump over an 8ft (2.4m) fence before vanishing into the night, still carrying its prey. Another woman walking her dog spotted something "half man, half dog" in the distance. She was terrified and her dog began shaking and refused to go any further along the path. Witnesses said that when the creature transforms, its upper body is more wolf than man – similar to the beast in the *American Werewolf* films. Hull historian Mike Covell and associates were planning a "werewolf hunt" with cameras and recording equipment at the next full Moon. Local Labour councillor Steve Wilson said: "I am happy to keep a diary of sightings by people around here and report them to Hull Council."



The sightings have been linked to the legend of Old Stinker, said to roam the Yorkshire Wolds, an area of beautiful countryside north of the Barmston Drain. More specifically, the beast is supposed to stalk the Wold Newton Triangle, allegedly a window area for ghosts and other paranormal activity near Scarborough. "There is the

legend of a werewolf called Old Stinker – a great hairy beast with red eyes, who was so called because he had bad breath," said author Charles Christian, author of *A Travel Guide to Yorkshire's Weird Wolds*, who said sightings went back centuries. "It was known for the wolves to dig up the corpses from graveyards. From that sprung the idea



TOP: Barmston Drain. TOP: Worcestershire witnesses Robert and Nicola Ingram.

that they were supernatural beings, which took the form of werewolves. When people would glimpse what they thought were the rear lights of a car in front, it would instead reveal itself to be the red eyes of a wolf."

• Robert Ingram and wife Nicola were driving past the National Trust property of Croom Court near Pershore in south Worcestershire at 1am one night in early April when they spotted a creature on the road ahead, its eyes reflecting the headlights. "We'd heard rumours about an escaped panther in the area, but we'd thought it was a load of nonsense," said Mr Ingram. "But when I saw this animal with my own eyes, I was stunned. It was enormous, far too big for a fox or a dog. It must have weighed about 9 stone [57kg] – about the same as a slim adult. It looked right at us and walked up to the car. It was as tall as our car window. It then lowered the front of its body and looked like it was going to pounce. We just slammed the car into reverse and went as far as we could. I was so scared I fumbled to get my phone out to take a picture, but we'd already driven quite far away. There was no way you were going to get me to go near it again to take a better picture. It was terrifying."

The couple later made a sketch of what they were certain was a black ABC (alien big cat). However, the pencil drawing appears to show an animal with almost human like traits: big eyes, eyebrows, a long nose and full set of teeth. It appears to be standing upright like a humanoid creature, rather than crouching like a cat. The beast also had protruding, pointed teeth and fearsome, sharp cheekbones. The press dubbed it the "Werewolf of Worcester". Was it like the one apparently lurking round the Yorkshire Wolds over 150 miles to the northeast? Well, possibly... *telegraph.co.uk*, 7 April; *Hull Daily Mail*, 6 + 24 May; *Sunday Express*, 15 May; *D.Mail*, 16 May 2016.



**ANIMAL
ATTACKS**
Bad-tempered
beaver, sole
vs whale, killer
camel and more
PAGE 8



**FANCY
FOOTWEAR**
Time-travelling
mummy found
wearing Adidas
trainers?
PAGE 14



**INFLATABLE
ANGEL**
Sex doll's
surprise visit
causes confusion
on remote island
PAGE 24

The Conspirasphere

Even presidential hopefuls play the Area 51 card these days. NOEL ROONEY watches the mainstream media musing on conspiracy theory and serving up gratuitous Nazi stories.

Hillary Clinton's stuttering election campaign received a lift, albeit of a marginal kind, when she announced, on a tour of talk shows, that if elected she would release documents about Area 51. Whether this will glean her more votes from Trump or Sanders supporters is a subject for speculation, though this writer favours Trump (only in this very singular respect, obviously). Her pledge didn't just get the Conspirasphere excited; the mainstream rippled with the news too.

In the Sphere, opinion was split between those who saw it as yet another sign that the bastion of the elite was crumbling, and those who saw it as simply a ruse to cover the real conspiracy surrounding those pesky emails. Some in the mainstream took it as an opportunity to muse on the subject of conspiracy theory in general; like George Johnson, of the *New York Times*, in a piece called *Why We Keep Dreaming of Little Green Men* (spoiler alert: Mr Johnson never actually tells us why).

Johnson's article is not the typical tin-foil-hat mockery. He has clearly done a modicum of research, enough at least to realise that academia takes an interest in conspiracy theory, and to understand that it is a coherent system of thought. What is perhaps more interesting is his familiarity with a whole swathe of conspiracy memes, and, critically, his assumption, evidenced by the in-jokes that decorate the story, that his readers are at least as knowledgeable as he is.

He gives a brief (and broadly accurate) potted history of conspiracy theory as his readers will understand it, and even offers a justification for the paranoid style as a viable choice of standpoint in a confusing and implicitly treacherous world. This is not a story about the fringes of society; it's about a belief system that is gaining

increasing traction among a growing number of people, in a culture that can be characterised as much by distrust as any other vice or virtue.

So a story circulating online, and recently picked up by the *Daily Mail*, is a propinquitous example of what the media mavens think the public wants to hear about. Peter Lohr, a retired mechanical engineer, has been talking about possible Nazi nukes hidden in the Jonas Valley in Thuringia, for some years; now he claims to have firm evidence that the bombs exist, and he knows where they are.

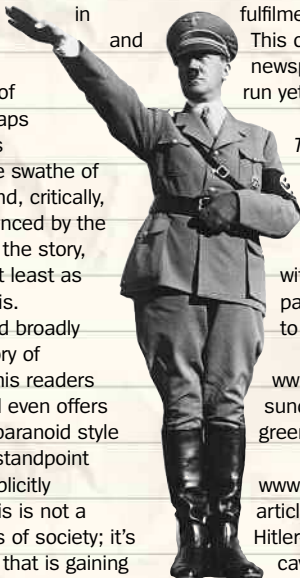
It's not clear how Mr Lohr knows that two of the five metal objects he has located in a cave by means of radar actually are atomic bombs (are they all always the same shape?), but it is true that the Jonas Valley was the scene of frantic activity in the later years of WWII and was of great interest to the Allies.

I'm tempted to propose that this story breaching the mainstream is also a side application of Godwin's Law (the law that states that all Internet arguments eventually resort to mentioning Hitler); the *Mail* certainly manages to approach the fulfilment conditions on a regular basis. This offshoot could be stated as: all newspapers eventually find a reason to run yet another Nazi story.

Incidentally, Johnson's *New York Times* article includes this passing comment: "There is no good word, at least in English, for conspiracy theorising". So, can any FT readers rise to the challenge and come up with a suitable term? See the editorial page for further details and the chance to win a year's supply of tin-foil.

www.nytimes.com/2016/05/15/opinion/sunday/why-we-keep-dreaming-of-little-green-men.html?ref=opinion&_r=1

www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3594579/Engineer-claims-Adolf-Hitler-s-secret-NUCLEAR-BOMBS-German-cave-warns-decay-Chernobyl-hands.html



EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES
FROM AROUND THE WORLD

**SAUDI MAN DIVORCES
WIFE OVER HER
LOVE FOR CAMEL**

Gulf News, —Mar 2015.

**Car chaos as dog drives
tractor on to motorway**

Guardian, 23 April 2015.

**Prostitutes gather
for beatification**

D.Telegraph, 15 May 2012S.

Drugs scare students in hospital

home.bt.com (British Telecom News online),
21 May 2015.

**Elephant
Man star
turns
into bat**

Sunday Times, 17 May 2015.

**Dragons on
the defensive**

Queensland Times, 25 April 2015.

**China bans
fake weather**

(Queensland) Sunday Mail, 3 May 2015.

PRIVATES ON PARADE

Shinto believers carry portable shrines bearing giant phalluses through the streets of Kawasaki, a suburb of Tokyo, during this year's Kanamara Festival ('Festival of the Steel Phallus') on 3 April 2016. The festival is centred on the Kanayama Shrine where the penis is venerated, celebrating a legend in which two women fashioned an iron phallus to defeat an evil demon. Originally a small local festival, this year's annual event attracted more than 20,000 people. Other attractions include vegetables carved into penises and phallus-shaped candy snacks. PHOTOS: TORU YAMANAKA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES





SIDELINES...

POP GOES THE WEASEL

In the early hours of 29 April, the Large Hadron Collider on the outskirts of Geneva was put out of action when a *fouine* (beech marten, a member of the weasel family) chewed through wiring connected to a 66,000-volt transformer. CERN said the LHC was expected to be out of action for several days. In 2009 it was shut down by what was suspected to be a bird, though no remains were found. *BBC News*, 29 April; *Guardian*, 30 April 2016.

RUDE AWAKENING

An Australian couple woke up in the middle of the night on 17 August to find a naked stranger asleep beside them. The intruder, a 25-year-old Irishman, had climbed into their beachside house in Sydney through a window left ajar for their cat. They called the police, but the man began convulsing and was taken to hospital to be treated for "possible drug-related health issues". (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph*, 18 Aug 2015.

WELL, STONE ME

Tracey Emin, 52, enfant terrible of Brit Art and "professor of drawing" (!) at the Royal Academy of Art, has married a large rock in her garden overlooking the sea in France, while wearing her father's white funeral shroud. "It's not going anywhere," she said. "It will be there, waiting for me." *FT* has previously noted women marrying the Berlin Wall in 1979 and the Eiffel Tower in 2008 [**FT240:22**]. *D.Telegraph*, 23 Mar 2016.

BEASTLY BEHAVIOUR

BITING BEAVER, FLATFISH VS WHALE AND SUICIDE BY LION



KOCA SULEJMANOVIC / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: If you meet an aggressive beaver, the advice is to run away and climb a tree.

BEWARE BEAVER!

Inna Plavoka, editor of the Latvian daily paper *Seychas*, rang Latvian Radio 4 to relate the following tale of woe. Late at night, a man referred to only as Sergei was walking the streets of Daugavpils, the country's second-largest city, when a beaver emerged from the shadows and sank its teeth into his leg. He tried fighting back and fell to the ground. It bit him again whenever he tried to get up. The vicious swamp-dweller was holding Sergei hostage. Desperate, he called rescue services on his mobile phone – but unsurprisingly they thought it was a prank call and hung up. Sergei then phoned a friend and was at first met with similar incredulity and enquiries as to his state of mind, but eventually managed to persuade said friend to come to his rescue. However, en route to the scene, the latter was pulled over for speeding. The police were of course sceptical of the friend's explanation that he was rushing to the aid of a stricken friend held hostage by a single beaver – not even a gang

The vicious swamp-dweller was holding Sergei hostage

of them. After subjecting the Good Samaritan to a breathalyser test, the police reluctantly accompanied him to the scene of the crime, where they called for backup from animal welfare officers who arrived to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the hostage situation. The beaver – a protected species in Latvia – made good its escape, while Sergei had to have 15 stitches in his leg.

Mihails Pupinš, director of the Daugavpils Zoo, said that in spring beavers could indeed be very aggressive as males are driven out of their lodges in search of new homes. They routinely cross cities, and if they encounter humans perceived as a threat they mount an attack. Pupinš advised running away – or

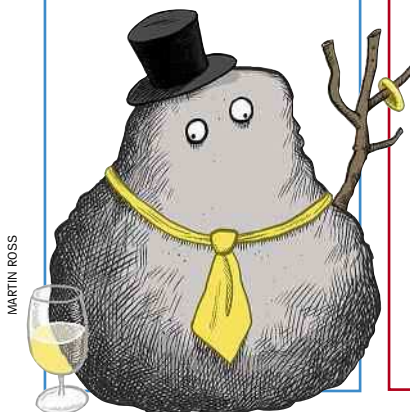
climbing a tree, though as is well known, even a tree can provide only temporary sanctuary from a determined wood-chomping mammal. *lsm.lv* (*Latvian radio*, Riga), 21 April 2016.

NAMIBIA'S GOAT-SUCKERS

Unknown predators that reportedly devour and suck blood from livestock have haunted villagers at Onheleiwa, Oidiva and Oikango of Ongwediva constituency in Namibia. Over the years, untold numbers of goats have been killed and exsanguinated. Villagers are convinced that the predators have something to do with witchcraft. They once accused an elderly man who had a house at Onheleiwa village and his sister who had a house at Oikango village of being the owners of these strange, blood-sucking beasts. Police were called to Onheleiwa where on several occasions they followed footprints larger than those of a dog. "We followed them but they walked until a spot where they just vanished," said Oshana police spokesperson Christina Fonseca. "It's difficult to explain what happened to those footprints because they looked as if [whatever made them] climbed onto something but it was in an open space."

Olivia Shikongo had her whole kraal wiped out by the creatures, leaving her with only two kid goats. All that was left were traces of hooves and heads, while other goats had their stomachs cut open and had no intestines or liver. Shikongo lost a total of 11 goats in two nights. The villagers that claim to have seen the predators said they look like tigers. Although they were scared for their lives, they said they understand that the animals do not attack human beings. "If you find them at night, they just sit still on the side of the path and wait for you to pass by," said one.

In the early hours of 21



MARTIN ROSS



ABOVE: The sole's tail sticking out of the dead pilot whale's blowhole.

April 2016, something killed and exsanguinated five goats in Ondeihaluka. The animals belonged to Selma Nandjaya, and were killed in the same fashion as many others in the area around Ongha since 2000. Two of the goats were bitten from behind, gutted and had some of their intestines removed. The other two were bitten and gutted, but no organs were removed. Two other goats were missing. Villagers were sure the killers were not dogs. "Come on my brother, is this a dog's spoor? And what kind of dog sucks blood?" asked one villager. You will notice that every place-name mentioned begins with 'O' – but this is probably neither here nor there. <http://2.bp.blogspot.com>, 21 Nov 2015; namibian.com.na, 22 April 2016.

BLOW ME!

Two pilot whales were killed in the space of weeks by flatfish 1,000 times smaller in a "Jonah-meets-David-and-Goliath" struggle. The giant mammals choked to death trying to eat the tiny fish, which became trapped in their blowholes as they attempted to escape. The events took place in November 2014, when a pod of 30-40 long-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala melas*) was spotted near the coasts of Belgium and the

eastern UK. No one knows what the whales were doing so far from their usual home in the North Atlantic – perhaps they were driven there by noise pollution. They soon vanished, but a badly decomposed pilot whale washed up on the Dutch coast six weeks later, with a common sole (*Solea solea*) stuck in the blowhole. This was the first record of a pilot whale suffocating on a fish since 1581. Three weeks later, another dead whale appeared: "When I got to the beach the second time," said Dutch post-mortem researcher Lonneke IJsseldijk, "I saw this tail sticking out of the blowhole and I thought: 'no way!'" *New Scientist online*, 24 Nov; *Metro*, 26 Nov 2015.

IN THE LIONS' DEN

On 21 May, Franco Luis Ferrada Roman, 20, forced his way into the lions' cage in the Metropolitan Zoo in Santiago, Chile, stripped naked, shouted something about

Jesus, and taunted the lions to attack him. Zookeepers initially sprayed the lions with a hose as they mauled the intruder and then fired a tranquilliser dart – but it missed and instead hit the young man in the neck. They were then obliged to shoot two of the lions dead in full view of a large crowd. When he was rescued, Ferrada Roman was found to be carrying a suicide note, which made allusions to the Apocalypse. He was said to be in a 'grave' condition, having suffered severe pelvic and head injuries as well as a tranquilliser overdose. The dead African lions, a male and a female, had been at the zoo for more than 20 years. The zookeepers were "deeply affected" by the undeserved deaths. *dailymail.co.uk*, 22 May; *D.Telegraph*, 23 May 2016.

CAMEL GETS THE HUMP

On the evening of the same day that Ferrada Roman made his suicide bid, a camel in Rajasthan's Barmer district in India severed its owner's head in anger. Urjaram was entertaining guests at his house in Mangta village when he suddenly realised that his camel had been out in the heat all day with its legs tied. When he went to untie the furious animal, it "lifted him by the neck and threw him to the ground, chewed his body and severed his head" said fellow-villager Thakara Ram. It reportedly took 25 villagers six hours to calm the animal down. Apparently, the camel had form, having attacked Urjaram in the past. *Times of India*, 23 May 2016.



ABOVE: Franco Luis Ferrada Roman threw himself to the lions; sadly, they paid the price for his actions.

SIDELINES...

AQUATIC PREDATOR?

On Leap Day (29 February) a mysterious predator mauled and killed 64 chickens and ducks in Xuanqiao Town, close to Shanghai Wild Animal Park in China. Feathers and flesh were scattered on the ground and iron fences were knocked down. Footprints indicated a web-footed animal with four toes on each foot. They certainly weren't dog prints, and the bites were bigger than those made by a dog. The animal park claimed that no animal was missing. *journal.com*, 2 Mar 2016.

EDINBURGH'S RED GUARDS

When Imogen Wilson, 22, raised her arms in disagreement at a council meeting of Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA), she was subjected to a vote on whether she should be removed for violating a "safe space environment". She was allowed to stay by 33 votes to 18, but was later threatened with another vote after shaking her head in disagreement. *D.Telegraph*, 4 April 2016.

DEAD CAT MIX-UP

One morning in January, Matt Strong, 35, met a woman 30ft (9m) outside his house in Manchester, carrying his tabby cat Gus, which she said had been the victim of a hit-and-run driver. Mr Strong buried the cat in his back garden, but when he returned home in the afternoon, he was stunned to find Gus with his brother Ralph. The dead cat, he said, "looked exactly like Gus, right down to the bits of fur it had missing from fighting." *D.Telegraph*, 26 Jan 2016.

GODFATHER MOMENT

A man walking through Harlem River Park in Manhattan at 11am on 28 February discovered a severed horse's head in a cardboard box. It was recalled that two goat heads had been found hanging from a streetlight in Brooklyn back in November 2014. Both events remain unexplained. *NY Daily News*, 29 Feb 2016.



SIDELINES...

HIDDEN EXTRA

Lindsay Hasz bit on a purple pearl worth £400 in her *frutti di mare* starter at an Italian restaurant in Issaquah, Washington State. It had come from a Quahog clam and was almost perfectly spherical. *komonews.com*, 24 Feb; Sun, 26 Feb 2016.

JAILER JAILED

Diana Franklin has been jailed for 190 years in Georgia, USA, after locking her adopted daughter naked in a chicken coop without food. She also tied the girl by the neck to a tree and subjected her to shocks with remote-controlled dog collars. She adopted the girl aged 10 in 2007. Now 18, the daughter said she was 'tormented' by the Bible-quoting Franklin until social workers found her in 2012. *Metro*, 10 Dec 2015.

CAMBERWELL WARNED

Magistrates fined Kingdom Church in Camberwell, south London, £7,740 for disturbing neighbours with noisy "witchcraft" healing ceremonies every Saturday at 3am, "a well-known time that witchcraft and negative elements begin to work," according to Bishop Climate Wiseman, who told councillors they faced the wrath of God. "You watch and see," he said. "Strange things are going to happen." *D.Telegraph*, 19 Mar; *D.Mirror*, 2 April 2016.



MARTIN ROSS

MEDICAL BAG

AMAZING CASES OF RECOVERED SIGHT AND A LOST SENSE OF SMELL CAUSED BY SNAKEBITE



KATRINA ELSKEN / ONEECHOBBE NEWS

ABOVE: Mary Ann Franco, who was blind for 21 years, with her brother, Rocky Powell, and her 20-year-old cat, Mr Rip, whom she had just seen for the first time.

SIGHT RESTORED

Mary Ann Franco, 70, went completely blind after suffering a spinal injury in a car accident 21 years ago and had long since given up hope of ever being able to see again. Recently, she suffered further injuries following a fall down stairs at her South Florida home and in April underwent an operation to alleviate neck and arm pains. When she awoke from surgery, she shocked relatives by saying simply: "Lady, you with all that purple on you, come over, give me something for the pain." Now she is getting used to seeing the world around her again; even her childhood colour-blindness has disappeared. She was able to see her seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren for the first time. Doctors are uncertain how the 'miracle' happened, but they speculate the car accident might have left damage that restricted blood flow to the part of the brain that controls vision, which the operation inadvertently corrected. "I've never seen it, never heard of it," said neurosurgeon Dr John Afshar. *Sky News*, 7 May; *Sunday Telegraph*, 8 May 2016.

Doctors are uncertain how the 'miracle' happened



Dick Roberts, blinded since an attack by thugs in 1981, regained his sight after tripping over his dog and banging his head on a cupboard door [FT42:5]. Other head-banging 'miracles' are typically caused by tripping over

leads to guide dogs, which blackly humorous event we have recorded in these pages at least four times. In one of our favourite cases, Edwin Robinson (pictured below in a Timex watch ad), blind and deaf following a road accident, regained both sight and hearing nine years later, after being struck by lightning [FT53:29]. Swede Henry Wahlburg was blinded when a fishhook stuck in his eye as a child. In 1981 his sight was restored when a tree branch went into his bad eye. Another Swede, Gun Thoreson, 43, had been blind since she was 20. When her dentist extracted three heavily filled molars, her sight was restored; her erstwhile blindness was possibly explained by 'oral galvanism' – a small electric current set up in the mouth between dissimilar metals [FT43:32]. A man blinded in one eye following a shrapnel wound in WWII regained his sight after being head-butted by a racehorse in the same location on his forehead 64 years later, in October 2006 [FT224:10]. For other cases of 'miraculous' restoration of sight, see FT57:31, 93:19, 98:19, 139:14, 144:12, 208:12, 257:11, 277:16.

BOTH BLIND AND SIGHTED

A blind woman left doctors stunned when she could suddenly see again after "switching personalities". The German patient, referred to only as B.T., was diagnosed with so-called cortical blindness after an accident in 1999 appeared to damage the part of her brain responsible for sight when she was 20. The now 37-year-old also has dissociative identity disorder (DID), where multiple personalities battle to control her personality. In total, she has 10 personalities, doctors treating her reported. During treatment for this disorder something remarkable happened: while she was in her teenage boy personality, her ability to see returned. Over the course of the therapy, she regained her sight while in eight out of 10 of her personalities. The woman's vision turned on and

off “within seconds”, depending on which personality she was experiencing, the doctors treating her reported in *PsyCh Journal*.

They now believe her blindness is not caused by brain damage but is instead psychosomatic. German psychologists Hans Strasburger and Bruno Waldvogel, who conducted the study, used an EEG to measure how the visual cortex of her brain responded to visual stimuli. It found when the patient was “blind”, her brain did not respond to the imagery, but while in a “sighted” personality state, she had normal measurements. At the time of her initial diagnosis, her health records show she was given vision tests involving special glasses, lights and lasers, which all pointed to blindness. As there was no physical damage to her eyes, it was assumed that the vision problems must have come from brain damage caused by her accident. When she was referred for psychotherapy 13 years later, she was found to have more than 10 personalities, all of a different age, gender and varied temperaments. Some personalities even communicated in different languages, a phenomenon thought to be linked to when she lived in an English-speaking country as a child. Four years into the treatment, while in an adolescent male state, she saw a word on the cover of a magazine. We should point out that DID is a controversial diagnosis, believed by some to be the result of years of abuse, while others believe it to be a cultural invention driven by therapists. *dailymail.co.uk*, 25 Nov; *blog.sfgate.com*, 27 Nov 2015.

PSYCHOGENIC BLINDNESS

Corporal H.M. was detailed to shoot Jews as a member of a firing squad in 1941 during the German advance in White Russia. On the night before he was due to take part in shooting practice, he became blind in his right eye and, as a right-handed marksman, was no longer able to shoot properly. He was transferred to the front, where he was wounded. He spent 18 months in military and civil hospitals and a sanatorium until he was discharged from the army in the middle of the war



DIEGO DELSO

ABOVE: *Pseudechis australis*, the largest terrestrial venomous snake in Australia.

because of his weak vision and “autonomic vasomotor neurosis”. His psychogenic amblyopia lasted 52 years until he was afflicted with amaurotic blindness in his left eye owing to an attack of glaucoma that had not been treated in time. The vision of his right eye increased again for the first time to 0.1 (10%), but remained reduced owing to a brunescant cataract. *Psychother Psychosom Med Psychol*. 1995 Mar-Apr;45(3-4):131-3.

DOESN'T MAKE SCENTS

While he was washing his hands at a roadside restroom, a 30-year-old Australian man was bitten on two fingers by a snake. A local resident trapped the reptile in a sink and killed it. The victim preserved it in a jar of alcohol, and shortly afterwards went to the emergency department of a regional hospital. Doctors found that he had temporary problems with blood clotting, too much protein in his urine and blisters that oozed with a clear liquid. He stayed at that hospital for three days, during which time he was given medication to prevent the bite wound from becoming infected, but his doctors considered his symptoms “mild enough to not warrant anti-venom administration”.

A few days after his release, he noticed his sense of smell began to deteriorate, and within weeks he completely lost the ability to smell. A year later, when he went to a neurology clinic at St Vincent's Hospital in Melbourne, tests confirmed that he was unable to detect smells – a condition

called anosmia. However, the examination of his nose and nervous system revealed no other abnormalities, which meant his anosmia did not have a structural cause and therefore most likely resulted from the snakebite. He has since regained some of his sense of smell, but it has not been fully restored. “As far as I know, he is still affected but somewhat improved,” said Kenneth D Winkel, a toxicologist at the University of Melbourne in Australia, who co-authored a report on the case.

The snake that the man had kept in the jar was sent to the Queensland Museum's herpetology department, where it was identified as a mulga snake (*Pseudechis australis*), the largest terrestrial venomous snake in Australia. Although mulga bites can be deadly, the most recent fatality was more than 40 years ago. Effects on the nervous system have rarely been reported following mulga bites; however, cases of long-term and permanent anosmia attributed to bites by other types of snake have been reported; this is said to “uncommon, but not rare”. In a previous study done in Australia, researchers examined the effects of bites from the red-bellied black snake (*Pseudechis porphyriacus*), and found that one in 57 affected patients developed anosmia. *P. porphyriacus* belongs to the same family as the mulga snake, called elapids. It is not clear whether administering anti-venom soon after a person is bitten might help prevent anosmia. *livescience.com*, 3 Mar 2016.

SIDELINES...

HANGING AROUND

Three masked men stunned passengers when they stuck giant meat hooks into their own backs in a metro carriage and suspended themselves from overhead handrails, leaving them dangling in mid-air on the train in Novosibirsk, south-central Russia. “They were pierced before the event by a professional, not on the metro,” said event organiser Alexander Kazakov. *Metro*, 2 Feb 2016.

ANNIVERSARY SHAKE

A magnitude 3.8 earthquake struck east of Anchorage in Alaska on Easter Sunday, 27 March – the 52nd anniversary of the devastating magnitude-9.2 Good Friday earthquake that reshaped the south-central Alaska landscape, the second strongest quake ever recorded. *Alaska Dispatch News*, 27 Mar 2016.

CAMP FEAR

Australians are paying about £50 for a camping trip where people jump out at you and chase you with chainsaws and axes after an evening watching horror films. *Horror Movie Campout* hires about 16 actors to roam the site in character with the aim of scaring as many people as possible. Last March, the organisers were expecting 1,000 punters at Mount Penang Parklands near Sydney. *(Queensland) Sunday Mail*, 13 Mar 2016.



MARTIN ROSS

NEW NORSE

Elfdalian, a rare language from the Viking Age, will be the sole language spoken to children attending the new nursery school in Alvdalen, central Sweden, the only community that still uses it. Elfdalian is believed to be the closest descendant of Old Norse, spoken more than 1,000 years ago. At the moment, only about 2,500 people can speak it, fewer than 60 of them children. Pupils will continue to learn the language until they turn 18.

BBC News, 17 Mar 2016.

LONG-LOST LITERATURE

An unknown passage from the Mesopotamian *The Epic of Gilgamesh* has been found, adding 20 lines to the 4,100-year-old poem. The cuneiform tablet had been bought by the Sulaymaniyah Museum in Slemani during the Iraq War, as part of an initiative to save artefacts from the black market. It gives new details about the arrival of the Sumerian king Gilgamesh and his companion Enkidu as they travel through the Cedar Forest. *Current Archaeology, Jan 2016.*

NO KIDDING

When police received a report of cries from a woman in distress at the notorious suicide spot of the Avon Gorge in Bristol, they scrambled a helicopter. Thermal imaging cameras on board quickly revealed that the "sobbing and wailing" was coming from a bleating goat. Six feral goats were introduced to Avon Gorge in 2011 to help boost the growth of local wildflowers. *D.Mail, 26 Jan 2016.*

POISONOUS MONIKER

The Court of Appeal has banned a mother in Powys, Wales, from naming her baby Cyanide after the poison that Hitler took before shooting himself. "It's a lovely pretty name," she said. She also chose the name Preacher for the girl's twin brother, but this too was blocked. The mother had a chaotic history of mental illness and substance abuse. *BBC News, 14 April 2016.*

Playing God

An Indian devotee dressed as Krishna participates in a religious procession at the Ram Navmi festival in Amritsar to commemorate the birth of Hindu deity Rama. PHOTO: NARINDER NANU/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



SCIENCE

RAIN MEN

From Tibet's shamanic cloud herders to US military experiments in cloud seeding, weather modification remains an elusive scientific goal says **DAVID HAMBLING**.

High in the Himalayas dwells a special type of shaman. Known as cloud herders, they take up their watching posts on mountaintops and, as well as warning of approaching storms, use ancient techniques to direct threatening clouds away from inhabited areas. The cloud herders start with hymns of praise to the Earth spirits; if these fail, they move on to threats, and may then drive off clouds with a slingshot like those used for herding yaks. The villagers believe entirely in the power of the cloud herders, and follow their instructions – such as avoiding domestic arguments – to help prevent storms.

The cloud herders are among the few remaining traditional weather practitioners. Others are involved in a supposedly scientific form of cloud management – but are the two as different as they seem?

Modern pluvioculture – drawing the rain – started after the American Civil War when it was observed that major battles often seemed to be followed by downpours. This seemed to be an effect of nucleation: the burning gunpowder sent large numbers of tiny particles into the air, and moisture from the clouds was able to form around these into raindrops. When the air is saturated with water, all that is needed are these nuclei for rain to fall.

In 1890, General Robert Dyrenforth carried out rainmaking experiments for the US government in Texas. After two years of explosions, his work had produced no perceptible improvement in rainfall. His funding was withdrawn, and the press dubbed him “General Dryhenceforth”.

The ground was not dampened, but neither was the enthusiasm for rainmaking. A large numbers of companies sprang up promising to produce rain on demand, especially in the US. There were plenty of colourful characters involved, including “rain wizard” Frank Melbourne who moved from Australia to Kansas, and British inventor “Professor” John Pepper who attempted to end a drought in



ABOVE: Scientist Vincent J Schaefer conducting cloud seeding experiments at General Electric's labs in Schenectady, New York, in the 1950s.

Queensland with cannon, rockets and explosives. The attempt was a failure, and almost resulted in disaster when an off-course rocket narrowly missed the assembled spectators.

There were plenty of occasions when rain did follow such activities, but it was impossible to prove a direct correlation between them. Successes were celebrated – even if they were a bit too successful. In 1902, Charles Hatfield, who described himself as a “moisture accelerator”, was paid to end a dry spell in San Diego. The subsequent downpour caused flash flooding and massive damage. Hatfield was not paid.

In 1946, American chemist and meteorologist Vincent Schaefer stumbled on the secret of cloud seeding when he put a block of dry ice into a cold box and found that his breath was condensing into clouds of ice crystals. Schaefer went on to carry out cloud seeding experiments, dropping dry ice from aircraft, sometimes with spectacular results.

Schaefer's apparent success encouraged the US military to carry out an attempt to damp down a hurricane in Project Cirrus. The idea was to increase the size of the eyewall and reduce the

strength of the hurricane. Eighty kilos of powdered dry ice were dropped on a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico in October 1947, which became known as the Cape Sable Hurricane. Unfortunately, when the hurricane changed course and struck near Savannah, Georgia, some blamed the seeding and threatened lawsuits. The 1952 Lynnmouth flood was blamed on RAF cloud seeding experiments (see **FT108:10**). This is the perpetual challenge of weather modification: it makes you legally liable for the weather, even if the modification reduced the damage. This is as big an issue as the technical challenge. After Schaefer, others seeded clouds with a variety of materials including silver iodide, which has a crystal structure similar to ice and appears to be particularly effective for nucleation.

The erratic and unpredictable nature of rainfall makes it impossible to tell whether a particular event is natural or manmade. Radical Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich (see **FT107:26-30**) created a ‘cloudbuster’. This could, he claimed, break up clouds and produce rain by launching orgone energy (a peculiar phenomenon known only to Reich) at them.

Apparently, at least one farmer thought it worked and paid him for his effort.

More serious statistical study suggests that cloud seeding is not necessarily any more effective than orgone energy. In 2004, the US National Research Council stated that there was no convincing evidence that it worked, as the success rate was 30 per cent or less.

In 2014, *Nature* reported on a six-year cloud seeding study over Wyoming carried out by the National Centre for Atmospheric Research. The researchers concluded that precipitation was increased by five to 15 per cent... perhaps. When compared with a random control area, rainfall in the seeded area did not show any increase. Then the researchers started excluding days where the seeding coverage had not been total, or where the wind was blowing the wrong way, and the positive results appeared. This type of data cherry-picking is, of course, extremely dangerous (see **FT 341:14**).

Cloud seeding with silver iodide from aircraft or rockets is still big in China. The technique has been credited with ending droughts (see **FT137:14**), and most famously it is supposed to have kept clouds away from the 2008 Olympic opening ceremony. Which brings us right back to cloud herding.

In his book *Mindscaping the Landscape of Tibet*, anthropologist and film-maker Dan Smyer Yu describes a dawn excursion in the mountains with a weather worker. The scenery was invisible under a murky white blanket with no chance of filming, but the shaman assured Yu that he could break the fog. He chanted praise to the mountain spirits for 15 minutes. Then the fog lifted and the peaks emerged into the morning sun.

Yu suggests that as well as their ritual value, the cloud herders' actions have “external practical results” and that the shamans' slingshots, arrows and sun-wheels “possess the same teleology as modern tools.”

There's an interesting challenge here. Our instinct may be to accept cloud seeding while rejecting cloudbusters and cloud herders as pseudoscience or superstition, and their successes as mere coincidence. But without solid statistical evidence, they are all on the same level from a scientific point of view. See also **FT247:8-9**.



ARCHAEOLOGY

PAUL SIEVEKING follows the complicated and macabre instructions used in making a “Hand of Glory”, the last example of which resides in Whitby Museum, and admires the fashionable footwear of a Mongolian mummy.

LAST HAND OF GLORY?

This mummified human hand was discovered early in the 20th century by a stonemason and local historian, Joseph Ford, who immediately identified it from popular stories of such objects as a “Hand of Glory”. It was hidden in the wall of a thatched cottage in Castleton, North Yorkshire, and was given to Whitby Museum in 1935, where it can still be seen.

A Hand of Glory is the preserved hand of a hanged convict, believed to have unique magical properties. It was often specified as being the left (Latin: *sinister*) hand or – if the man was hanged for murder – the hand that “did the deed”. The term derives from the French *main de gloire*, a corruption of *mandragore* (mandrake). Gérard de Nerval popularised this ritual object in his 1832 short story *La main de gloire, histoire macaronique* (“The Hand of Glory, a Macaronic Story”). In the 1973 film *The Wicker Man*, the innkeeper tries to put Sergeant Howie to sleep using a Hand of Glory. Its power is such that the innkeeper’s daughter expresses concern that “he might sleep for days”.

The preparation of such a powerful talisman was complicated. First, the hand of an executed felon had to be cut off while the body was still hanging from the gallows. The worse the crime, the more effective the magic. Once the blood was drained, the hand was wrapped in a cloth



ABOVE: The “Hand of Glory” found in the wall of a thatched cottage in Yorkshire and still on display in Whitby Museum.

(preferably the winding sheet of a freshly buried corpse) and, according to an old recipe published in a book from 1823: “Pickled in salt, and the urine of man, woman, dog, horse and mare; smoked with herbs and hay for a month; hung on an oak tree for three nights running, then laid at a crossroads, then hung on a church door for one night while the maker keeps watch in the porch”.

In a work of 1722 called *Petit Albert*, a variant method of preparation is given: “Take the right or left hand of a felon who is hanging from a gibbet beside a highway; wrap it in part of a funeral pall and so wrapped squeeze it well. Then put it into an earthenware vessel with zimat, nitre, salt and long peppers, the whole well powdered. Leave it in this vessel for a fortnight, then take it out and expose it to full sunlight during the dog-days until it becomes quite dry. If the sun is not strong enough, put it in an oven with fern and vervain. Next make a kind of candle from the

fat of a gibbeted felon, virgin wax, sesame, and ponie.” *Zimat* is thought to mean verdigris or maybe the Arabian sulphate of iron. *Ponie* was thought to be horse-dung, but in the 1752 edition of *Petit Albert*, *ponie* becomes *sisame de Laponie*, translated in 1787 by Francis Grose as Lapland sesame – but this is uncertain. In one version, the clenched hand was used as a candleholder for a candle incorporating human fat; but in another (consistent with the Whitby specimen) the outstretched hand had its own fingers dipped in the fat of a gibbeted felon and lit. Burglars used the hand to ensure their victims fell into a deep supernatural sleep. Should one of the fingers refuse to light, it was a sign that someone in the household remained awake. As the baddies entered the property – now illuminated by the glow from the burning hand – they chanted the following: *Let those who rest more deeply sleep, / Let those awake their vigils keep, / O Hand of Glory,*

shed thy light, / Direct us to our spoil tonight.

The *Petit Albert* provides a way to shield a house from the effects of the Hand of Glory: “The Hand of Glory would become ineffective, and thieves would not be able to use it, if you were to rub the threshold or other parts of the house by which they may enter with an unguent composed of the gall of a black cat, the fat of a white hen, and the blood of the screech-owl; this substance must be compounded during the dog-days.”

Stories of the use of Hands of Glory became common across Europe, from Finland to Italy and Western Ireland to Russia in the last 400 years. At least two were current in North Yorkshire, one relating to the Spital Inn on Stainmore in 1797 and the other to the Oak Tree Inn, Leeming, supposedly in 1824. However, the Whitby hand is said to be the last in existence. whitbymuseum.org.uk; ancient-origins.net; *D.Express online*, 27 Oct 2015.

MUMMY WEARING ‘ADIDAS SHOES’

Archæologists have found mummified human remains thought to be 1,500 years old interred at an altitude of 10,000ft (3,000m) in Mongolia’s Altai Mountains. In what more excitable commentators see as evidence for time travel, the feet appear to be in a pair of trainers with the iconic three-stripe logo of the German sportswear brand Adidas. The experts, of course, have reacted to such speculation with raised eyebrows and sighs, but nevertheless find the discovery just as exciting. “This person was not from an elite, and we believe it was probably a woman, because there is no bow in the tomb,” B Sukhbaatar, a researcher at Khovd Museum, told the *Siberian Times*. “Now we are carefully unwrapping the body and once this is complete the specialists will be able to speak more precisely about the gender.” Sukhbaatar added that it was the “first complete Turkic burial, at least in Mongolia... a very rare phenomenon. The grave was three metres deep.” *Metro*, 12 April 2016.



CLASSICAL CORNER



FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

200: THEIR SPORTING LIFE

(Titular inspiration from David Storey)

“When a small boy, we puzzled over inconsistencies in the Bible, sometimes puzzling right through a game of baseball” – Fort, in Jim Steinmeyer’s *The Man Who Invented the Supernatural* (2008, pp20-1)

Not many celebrity gladiatorial manager/trainers in Rome. Of the few on record (there’s not a single autobiographical inscription), earliest (105 BC) is Aurelius Scaurus, at Capua in southern Italy.

A generation later, also at Capua, came the only famous one, Lentulus Batiatus, accidentally immortalised (like Pontius Pilate) because in charge when Spartacus and team-mates staged their 73 BC breakout – clearly Batiatus had lost the dressing room.

No chance of being ennobled, as Sir Alex. The *lanista* – Etruscan for ‘executioner’, according to 7th-century etymologer Isidore of Seville (now patron saint of the Internet) – was (along with pimps and slave dealers) the most despised figure in society – “the most contemptible and vilest of men” (Seneca, *Epistles* 87. 15) – debarred from holding public office and similar disqualifications.

Still, Batiatus has had his modern moments in the sun, played in *Spartacus* by Oscar-winning Peter Ustinov, also reincarnated in the telly-Spartacus

episodes ‘Blood & Sand’ and ‘Gods of the Arena’.

Lanistæ were also allowed to referee matches. EPL bosses, of course, try to do that from their technical areas. They and fans alike would often appreciate the Roman technique of flogging or branding players thought not to be pulling their weight.

Petronius (*Satyricon*, ch45) has a punter bemoaning “some clapped-out fighters, they’d have collapsed if you’d blown on them, hamstringed the lot, deserved the flogging the fans shouted for,” contrasting this fiasco with another show that was “a regular slaughterhouse, bang in the middle where the stands could see it.”

No shortage of WAGS. Pompeian graffiti (CIL 4. 4289, 4342, 4356, 4397, 8915, 8916) have fighters Celadus and Crescens complimented as “Fascinators and Lords of all the girls, just what the ladies need at night...” Modern thoughts turn to John Terry and company, though I’ve a sneaking suspicion the blokes may have written these up themselves.

Perhaps not always, Juvenal (elsewhere deploring topless women beast-fighters – they’d fill a modern stadium) explodes (*Satire* 6 vv82-110) over senator’s wife Eppia eloping with a gladiator: “What did she see in him? Her Sergius was no spring chicken, 40 if a day, a dud arm about to put

him out of the game, smashed-in face, bulbous nose, weeping eye. You name it. Yes, but he was a GLADIATOR!”

You’d expect passions of all kinds to run high. Amazingly, not so at Rome. The Colosseum’s one recorded riot was over bread shortages, not sport. Circus Maximus was equally quiet. Mimes (pop stars) were the ones that caused trouble.

One provincial exception was the brawl (AD 59, Tacitus, *Annals*, bk14 ch17) with its “appalling slaughter” of visiting fans from neighbouring Nuceria – a local derby run riot. Nero and the authorities responded with a 10-year closure of the arena – FIFA, take note.

The Colosseum’s calm may be a tribute to its tightly organised system of all-ticket admission and seating – hard to headbutt or hotleg a rival fan while sedentary.

Modern-style hooliganism infested early Byzantine chariot racing. Instead of Robert Mancini-like scarves, the fans wore billowing cloaks, long moustaches and beards, ‘Hun’ hairstyles (short front, long back), giving ‘fascist’ salutes while chanting their particular songs, for example “Burn Here, Burn There! Not a Blue (or Green) anywhere! – their version of You’ll Never Walk Alone (or Again).

In the ‘Nike (Victory) – they were *not* rioting over trainers) Revolt of AD 532, the two main fan groups (Blues and Greens) joined forces – can’t see this happening in Glasgow or Manchester – destroyed much of Constantinople, and almost toppled emperor Justinian until he (urged by empress Theodora, his ‘Iron Lady’) sent in the troops to massacre the mob.

Nowadays, British grounds seem a lot tamer than back in the 1970s and 1980s. Fashions change. Byzantine fan violence melted away, to the

point where Blues and Greens were singing together in massed choirs at court (imagine veteran Millwall Nutters chanting at a Royal Command Performance), plus surrogates of re-enacting such sporting abstrusities as ‘The Gothic Game at the Feast of the Nineteen Beds,’ about which our ignorance may be bliss.

More details in my ‘Sports Fans of Rome and Byzantium’, *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 9 (1984), pp28-30 – surely the right city to publish it in. Thought this adumbration might add some ‘Sporty Spice’ to the Column – always did have a weakness for Melanie Chisholm...



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Based on the erosion process 'solid rock to boulders to pebbles to sand' our great scholars collectively agreed that to form all the sand in the world would take a thousand million years, an aeon, and confirmed "This Planet Must Be Old"

Dictionary – Sand – Created over the past half billion years.

From this point onwards everything known to the history of Mankind was constructed. Deeptime was born; sedimentation rates, dinosaurs, fossil record, evolution, plate tectonics, are all dated from this old planet perspective. Combined facts that give radioactivity there atomic readings.

However' an aeon to form the entire world's sand is totally wrong because beach pebbles are formed by the process of tidemark, they get bigger not smaller. Every dirty tide leaves a mark, a dirty stain over the previous hardened and scuffed stain, broken layers clearly seen if one

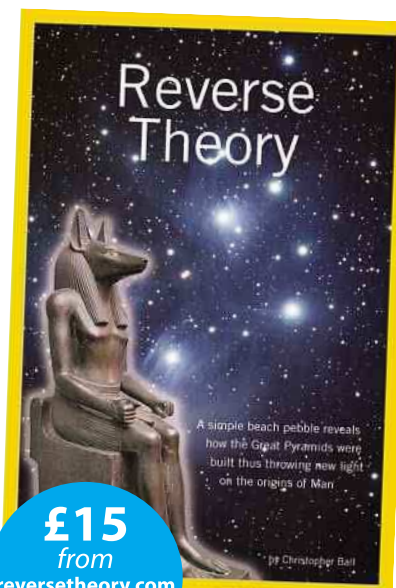
wishes to see them. A sea-basin is just like a dirty washbasin and the mechanics are fully explained in this powerful and detailed book.

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SPECIAL REPORT

MALAYSIAN MALAISE

BOB RICKARD INVESTIGATES A RECENT OUTBREAK OF MASS HYSTERIA IN A NUMBER OF MALAYSIAN SCHOOLS IN KELANTAN STATE

The latest flap of schoolroom hysteria began on Monday, 11 April 2016, in the coastal city of Kota Bharu – the capital of Kelantan state, bordering Thailand on the far northeastern coast of the Malaysian peninsula. It continued through the week, in which time it spread to three neighbouring secondary schools. All of this occurred in the same fortnight that brought Malaysians a heatwave, the birth of a “human-faced goat baby” and reports of an “amok man” attacking statues of the Nine-Planet-gods in a Hindu temple.

THE KICK-OFF

That morning, around 25 female students in Pengkalan Chepa 2¹ – a secondary school in the Pengkalan Chepa district of Kota Bharu – experienced panic attacks in which some of them claimed to see malevolent spirits. The crying and swooning spread through the school from class to class, ‘infecting’ other students. Estimates of those affected ranged from 75 to 100 students and 11 teachers. Two days later, on Wednesday, pupils and staff were sent home and the school closed. At this point similar phenomena were reported from the three other schools within a three-mile (5km) radius.

What actually happened is difficult to determine, as media reporting was restricted, vague and sometimes contradictory.² Shortly after the mid-morning break, according to the Malay-language newspaper *Sonar Harian*, a boy student returning from the lavatory claimed he glimpsed a black shape in the corridor. Another edition of the same paper said that a student “claimed to have seen aliens in an empty classroom”.³ The majority of reports said students became frightened after seeing “a black figure” in a school corridor or in their classrooms.

The story soon mutated from



ABOVE: Pengkalan Chepa 2, the Kota Bharu school where the outbreak began.

The crying and swooning spread through the school

glimpsing a disturbing figure or feeling a sinister presence to a sense of being under attack. One of the few male students affected told *Sonar Harian* that he felt a numbness in his hands while his mind “was all over the place”. Significantly, while many reported feeling paralysed or “pinned down” there are hardly any descriptions of the entity inflicting this oppression.

The tension also spread to some teachers. Norlelawati Ramli, 32, said that as she was tending to a student who complained of seeing demons, her own arms felt heavy as though “something” was pinning her down. She told the *Astro Awani* news channel that she recited the Quranic prayer *Istighjar* until things calmed down. By the time she was sent home she felt “as though someone was hanging on to

the left side of my body”. A similar sensation was reported by another teacher, Kamariah Ibrahim, who said she tried to recite verses from the *Qur’an* when she realised that she was losing control of herself. “I saw a black figure... trying to enter my body... I felt like my head was bloating. I was numb and tears kept pouring down my face”. She “silently recited the *Ayatul Kursi*”⁴ over and over again, then my head began to feel lighter after about an hour.”

IT SPREADS

Inevitably, the incident triggered outbreaks in the three other neighbourhood schools. At Pengkalan Chepa (PC1), the initial reports were almost identical to those from PC2. A male Form Five student (i.e. aged between 16-17) at PC1 said six female students started screaming after seeing a “black shape”. At Kemumin (K) 20 girls aged 16 collapsed “*en masse*”; and at Kubang Kerman 3 (KK3), in the south of the city, there were 30 more cases before the week was out. The outbreaks at these three schools were reported to have begun several days after that at PC2. The descriptions

recorded in this ‘second stage’ – e.g. the shape had an “ugly and hairy” face – could well have been influenced by those heard from pupils at the other schools or from the press reportage. The unnamed Kemumin boy cited above added: “I also had the experience of being attacked during forms one and three at PC2, but now, after attending PC1, the ‘disorder’ happened less often.” This too could be significant as it hints firstly at previous outbreaks (which were officially denied), and secondly highlights the mobility of students in the neighbourhood as a vector for stories and rumours. Another factor in these outbreaks may have been the publication of a dubious photograph, allegedly taken by a student.

APPARITIONS

We don’t know whether it was the girls or the press who first used the emotive term *pontianak* (see panel over page). Certainly this word is headlined in *The Star* printed on the 19th, presenting interviews with two of the girls. One, 17-year-old Raja Nor Atirah Hurmaishah, is introduced as having been “possessed by a *pontianak*” after she saw ‘something’ in the school toilet on Wednesday. The girl, from Form Five at PC2, said: “I could not believe what I saw. Both my arms began to go numb and then my mind went blank and I was frozen on the spot. I tried to call out for help but could not open my mouth. After that everything went dark.” She then “thanked God that I did not jump off the school building”. She has since had nightmares and a desire “to skip school in fear of being possessed again”.

The cultural reference to a black possessing figure, mentioned in reportage, is to a vengeful, vampiric female demon – called, in Bahasa Melayu, a *pontianak* – a popular feature in traditional Malay ghost literature. The figure is also an ubiquitous meme in Asian social media sites in the form of stereotyped faked selfies based largely upon the tragic character of Sadako from Japanese horror

film *The Ring* (1998). This visual reference became evident when some papers published a photo of a generic school corridor with what looks like a hooded black figure peering around a pillar. Despite the lack of any corroboration, the proximity of this image to reports of actual incidents underway would have resonated with young people throughout Southeast Asia. This local reportage undoubtedly heightened anxiety by treating the apparition as real, as well as the spiritual danger posed to the students by possession. Officially, the word 'exorcism' is not used but, nevertheless, media reportage is full of references to 'spirits' and 'possession' and to Quranic prayers that could be construed as exorcism.

The BBC reported that a senior school staff member at PC2 confirmed to them that "our students were possessed and disturbed [by these spirits]" and that staff were baffled by the cause. "The school was old," he said. "These children can be



ABOVE: A photo shows a dark figure lurking behind a pillar in a school corridor. The image was first posted on Twitter by Malaysian journalist Phillip Golingai, who claimed that it had been taken by a student.

disobedient and sometimes throw their rubbish around the school grounds. Perhaps they hit some *djinn* and offended the spirits," he speculated. The schools did what they have traditionally done in similar cases in the past. After sending everyone home, pupils and staff were, later, called back for counselling and prayers by *ustaz* and *ustazah*.⁵

THE UNSEEN FORCE

Significantly, the Kelantan experiences form a pattern in which the school lavatories were associated with a demonic assault that left students fainting and paralysed. Another Form Five student, Fatin Nor Atikah, at PC1, told *The Star* that she had twice before been possessed in the lavatories. "The spectre was

so ugly that I went into fits and felt paralysed, like I was being pinned down by an unseen force. In both cases, I fainted for several hours [and] later was revived by an *ustaz* in the school."

These incidents occurred during the previous two years, when Atikah was in Forms Three and Four. From this we can infer that there was a prior history of mass hysteria in schools in the area, and in this school in particular. This is of interest because according to Siti Hawa Mat, the principal of PC1's sister school, PC2 had no such antecedents; she told *Free Malaysia Today* that "this was the first such case that happened at the school since it was built in 2001". There is obviously a difference between the subjective views of those who experienced the 'attacks' and the objective views of those who were observers.

A 35-year-old Thai *bomoh* from Sungai Golok – who only wanted to be known as Tok Wan Mat – said that "during my

THE GENESIS OF A VAMPIRIC GHOST

While the Kelantan girls are said to have been possessed by a *pontianak*, the particular image they are referencing is a modern conflation of the characteristics of several different types of traditional vampiric female demons from Southeast Asia, familiarly represented by the ghost of Sadako from the notorious Japanese horror film *The Ring* (1998). A Japanese form – the *onryō* – can be traced back to the eighth century, and is an archetypal vengeful female ghost with wild, long black hair that torments its victims. It falls in the class of ghosts (*yurei*) called *inen*, which possess their victims. The disturbing figure of Sadako – a modern icon of the *onryō* – has become a ubiquitous Internet meme, especially on Asian social sites. Google any of the words here and you'll come up with pages of the same imagery featuring her sinister pose and face masked by long black hair, patched into the background of group portraits and selfies. She is also a feature, now, of Hallowe'en parties in Malaysia,

where this variant is called *kuntulanak*.

There is another, fearsome form of vengeful, vampiric female demon, familiar throughout Southeast Asia, known as *penanggalan* in Malaysia (*manananggal* in Filipino lore) from a root-word meaning 'detach' or 'remove'. (The Indonesian, Thai and Cambodian versions have their own words.) A beautiful woman by day, this living (i.e. Not one of the undead)

demon parks her lower half while her torso and head, with entrails dangling, roams the night looking for human blood. Like the Japanese *ubume*, she is always female and is sometimes said to have died in childbirth; but unlike the *ubume*, who is solely obsessed with finding her baby, the *penanggalan* sublimates her vengeance to target the living.



A third element of the modern *pontianak* is the *lansuir*, again a Malay woman who died in childbirth but who now flies at night to kidnap and devour newborn babies. The *lansuir* is always depicted as pale, with floor-length black hair, glowing eyes and sharp fangs. If her baby had also died during the birth, it is thought to become a *pontianak*.

This cross-cultural mash-up of images is largely due to the

Malaysian horror film – which reached its peak in the late 1950s with *Sumpah Pontianak* (1958) and the Shaw Brothers adaptation *Anak Pontianak* (1958) – embedding these images firmly in the Malaysian imagination. This influence was recognised by at least one blogger – Zakiah Koya of *theheatmalaysia.com*, 16 April 2016: "As many of these [outbreaks] take place in majority-Malay schools, some quarters have blamed it on Malay movies which have perpetuated beliefs in the supernatural. Malay movies on *pontianaks*, *pochongs* [corpses in a shroud] and *hantus* [ghosts] have been money-making box-office hits."



'conversation' with the spirits, including *pontianak* and *pocong* [corpses in shrouds], they said they would return to the school to disturb the students and teachers again." His prediction turned out to be correct. He said some of the spirits claimed the school has been their 'home' for years. "Other spirits said they were purposely sent by certain individuals to create trouble for the school, especially its teachers and students," he said.

ENTER THE HEALERS

Some sources said that *bomohs* – described as Malay 'traditional healers' and more crassly in some Western reports (including the BBC) as 'witch doctors' – were also called in by school officials. One *bomoh*, Wiru Sankala, sounded quite sensible, stating that the recent hot weather and reports of the hysteria were perpetuating an existing problem: the "repressed emotions" of students. Significantly, the staff, too – in this case, as in so many others – not only believe the supernatural lore enacted here, but openly made statements which reinforced the beliefs of the children.

Often the intercessions of the *bomohs* and *ustazes* fail. "The use of so many *bomohs* and native healers can be a double-edged sword," says Robert Bartholomew, a medical sociologist who has researched mass hysteria in Malaysia.⁶ "Especially if they fail, because they legitimise the supernatural aspects of the outbreak. As a result, the outbreak is likely to be

prolonged." The Alor Setar case of 1987, studied by Bartholomew, went on for five years.

In the Kelantan case, in the week following the shutdown of PC2, with the students and teachers affected given 'prayer sessions', a reporter from the *Free Malaysia Today* newspaper who re-visited the PC2 campus found outbreaks continuing to occur. He said that "screaming and shouting" was heard several times by media reporters waiting outside.

On 18 April the Malaysian Education Ministry announced that they were giving the Kelantan schools "the benefit of the doubt for cancelling classes," and asked for a "full report". The Deputy Education Minister Chong Sin Woon declined to comment on the outbreak until the ministry was "fully briefed", but was obviously aware that the schools had brought in *ustazes* and *bomohs* to "supposedly rid the school of bad spirits". All Chong would say was that "the school was being afforded the flexibility to have a holiday under the same provisions the ministry would grant any other school under circumstances such as heatwaves or haze".

A letter writer to *The Star* (19 April) referred to a study of outbreaks among factory workers undertaken by Prof Datuk Ir Dr Abu Bakar Jaafar, who traced the source of similar hysterics to the poor diet of Malay employees compared with Chinese ones. The writer concluded: "I strongly recommend to the principal of the school that the pupils be served more protein-rich food."

MASS HYSTERIA

Southeast Asia has a long history of what academics call 'culturally-based psychogenic illness'. The Malay word *amok*, for example, is classified as a psychiatric syndrome in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-IV TR), and is characterised by a period of brooding leading to a spontaneous outburst of violence against others before a collapse into unconsciousness. Like 'hysteria', it can be a release mechanism for internal stress and conflicts. Given the extent of social and emotional repression in some parts of Islamic society, the prevalence of hysterical reactions is predictable.

Bartholomew called the Kelantan case "a textbook outbreak" of "mass sociogenic illness". He had the opportunity to study several outbreaks while he lived and did research in Malaysia, including the outbreak in 1987, involving 36 Muslim girls, aged between 13 and 17, in a Malay hostel at Alor Setar in the far northwestern state of Kedah. Some of the common elements that he found include pre-existing fears or beliefs within the community that allow collective delusions to form quickly and spread rapidly. "Malays are susceptible because of their belief in an array of spirits," said Bartholomew. Small, tight-knit groups in enclosed surroundings such as schools, orphanages and factories are particularly vulnerable to unusually high levels of stress and anxiety. Malay boarding schools are sometimes overcrowded and

privacy non-existent. "Frustration and anger can build over weeks or months," he said. The Alor Setar girls complained of "too much religion and study, and too little recreation." Typical manifestations of 'conversion hysteria' include shouting, running, mental confusion, crying, bizarre movements, hallucinations, trance states and claims of 'spirit possession'.

Increasing numbers of education professionals seem more willing to speak out on the issue – even if their understanding is not taken up by the schools or the Ministry.

Paul Jambunathan, a clinical psychologist at Monash University in Petaling Jaya, declared that not enough "stress management [was] being taught in [Malaysian] schools or universities". He told *The Star*: "When you have people in a group sharing anxiety and stress, and... primed, without any stress-coping mechanisms... all it needs is for someone to light the fuse." He added: "Seeing a [popular] figure collapse or go into hysteria would have a triggering effect".

Prof Datuk Dr Wazir Jahan Karim, a medical anthropologist and founder-director of the Academy of Socio-Economic Research and Analysis, recommended "group counselling by clinical psychologists or medical anthropologists" first, followed by "sessions conducted by an *ustazah* with a good relationship with the students". It is important, she said, "that such sessions should not be held in the students' school as the environment itself might



ABOVE: A teacher from Pengkalan Chepa 2 points to classrooms affected by the Pontianak panic, while a notice goes up informing pupils that the school is temporarily closed.

trigger hysteria". As the studies by Bartholomew and others have concluded, the sooner the affected pupils are separated from each other, and calmed in a quiet place *away* from the scene of the outbreak, the sooner the panic subsides. This had worked in a case Dr Karim had studied in the early 1990s, among young Malay girls working away from home in a factory; but in Kelantan students and teachers were required to return to the school for their 'prayer sessions'.

Prof Wazir's study highlighted two other ingredients common to school panics: that most of the 'victims' were girls and were "finding it difficult to cope with their syllabus"; also they were "kept on a tighter leash" than their male counterparts in schools or dormitories. Similar cases can be found in other Islamic countries, such as Jordan and Turkey. Prof Wazir also noted that in Kelantan some teachers themselves succumbed to the group hysteria. She wondered just how new or young these adult

'victims' were, because "more experienced and mature teachers usually did not display such behaviour".

In contrast, Dr Wan Zumusni Wan Mustapha from the Universiti Teknologi Mara in Seremban – who has lived and taught in Kelantan for 13 years – voiced the view of modern rationalists when she told the BBC the incident "could have just been brought on by heat, stress or the haze". Indeed, during the Kelantan case, Malaysia experienced a continuous temperature exceeding 37°C (99°F) for 72 hours. (*Star*, 19 April), which would certainly have exacerbated matters.

THE OFFICIAL VIEW

The Malaysian educational authorities have their own traditional response to the phenomenon of mass hysteria in their schools. They rarely (and only then, reluctantly) comment on the subject. No surprise then, that the Kelantan State deputy education director, Jaafar Ismail,

said that the schools should be left alone "to follow the standard operating procedures".

Bomohs are barely tolerated by the Islamic courts, and only if they behave discreetly and within Islamic laws, because they are seen as a throwback to pre-Islamic paganism. Nevertheless, *bomohs* flourish, servicing Malay society at every level from rural *kampongs* to city palaces. The degree of 'institutionalised' superstition in Malaysian society not only fosters the conditions under which this type of mass hysteria occurs but ensures that no official lesson is learned.

Kelantan is probably the most traditional of Malaysia's states, where Sharia law is paramount.

In Malay schools – whether for boarders or day students – pupils are strictly segregated and subjected to an extensive regimen of rules governing personal and social 'cleanliness'. Add homesickness, the stress of exams and youthful excitability and you have conditions which, historically, have been noted in, say, the hysteria outbreaks in 16th and 17th century European convents.

At the end of the first week of the outbreak, several important announcements were made. The Chairman of School Management, Che Abdullah Mohamad, said he had monitored the events at the school and found "the situation back to normal, without any interference". He denied reports in English newspapers that the PC2 "hysterical attack" was ongoing. He did acknowledge, though, the stress building towards the coming May examinations, and endorsed "swift action by the school – including the principle of separating students

The incident could have been brought on by the heat



ABOVE: 'The Exorcism', by French painter Andre Brouillet (1857-1914). Musicians sing to a child in order to exorcise the *djinni* or evil spirit that has taken over his body.



ABOVE LEFT: Collapsed girls are attended by *ustazes*, teachers and medical staff. ABOVE RIGHT: Frightened girls gather for prayers outside the PC1 school.

involved, which can prevent the incident from spreading to other students.”

DIRTY PLACES

At the same time, another line of official ‘blame’ was developing: girl students’ menstruation. The principal of PC2, Eve Mat, said: “Today we carry out rehabilitation sessions with Islamic medical nurses, including prayers and reading of verses from the holy *Qur’an*.” Again, it was stressed that this was the first incident of its kind since the school was established 15 years ago.

One of the first senior officials called in by the PC2 school was Datuk Baharuddin Abu, founder of the city’s Islamic Medical Centre Al-Qalam.⁷ He began by exhorting the girls to maintain their “ablutions” as this was “a fortress to ward off spirits” (he used the word *djinn*). “Spirits”, he declared, do not like cleanliness, and get angry if their “residences” are disturbed by cleaning. “[This] results in hysterical attacks”.

This euphemistic phrasing will be familiar to anyone aware of the customs of *taboo* and spiritual cleanliness, but in case anyone misunderstood him, Baharuddin explains: “*Djinn* like napkins tainted with blood as their food and they will be drawn to your own proprietary pad. After all, the *djinn* always inhabit dirty places”. He also blamed jealousy and envy; nor, he said, could he rule out magic.

Referring to the matter of the dark shape, Baharuddin said that such entities “can take a variety of shapes and approach the faint

of heart, especially girls during their *menses*”. Further confusion was added by the *Sinar Harian*’s ambiguous headline: “Female students are advised to keep cleaning pads handy as they are a charm against *djinn*”. It is not hard to imagine how these words must have mortified the teenage girls, having something so private (their *menses*) discussed so publicly, when they were already anxious about how easily and quickly they were caught up in the collective panic and lost control of their bodies and dignity.

Baharuddin also coordinated the “rehabilitation treatment sessions” at the PC2, described in the reports from *Sinar Harian*. “Four students, accompanied by two teachers, were told to take ablution and directed to sit on mats facing Mecca. Afterwards, their faces were wiped with a white cloth three times. They seemed calm. Treatment sessions continued with the student lying flat. For about 10-30 minutes, their stomachs were pressed while Baharuddin read verses from the *Qur’an* in order to draw the spirits into the students’ stomachs, after which the ‘creatures’ inhabiting their bodies were finally removed into an empty bottle.” How this was any different from what *bomohs* do was not explained.

AFTERSHOCKS

Barely a fortnight passed before there were more outbreaks at PC2. On 5 May, several papers reported that: “More than 30 female and several male students were again struck by the ‘body possession’.” The situation

was said to be “more tense” as “many were screaming and yelling for no apparent reason”. Two Civil Defence ambulances took students to the nearest government clinics and around 1,000 students were sent home early. A Form Two student said the hysteria occurred, as before, after the morning break. “This is much scarier than the last one. I saw my classmate was screaming at the top of her voice and was aggressive.” Another Form Three student said the hysteria quickly spread to other students after two of her classmates were “possessed”, adding: “It was so bad it affected all classroom studies”. The principal could not be reached for comments.

Five days later, *The Star* confirmed that: “Almost all the students in Forms 1 to 5 at PC2 have had to miss the first class period over the past month to dedicate the time to special prayers after daily outbreaks of mass hysteria”. The prayers are “to rid the school of ‘bad spirits’.” Students were reportedly seeing *pontianaks* and *pocong*s before they became “possessed”. This time *bomohs* from Perak state were called, along with police officers, to counsel the students collapsing at a rate of three a day.

A Form Three student said: “It’s now routine for the students to gather at the school foyer to conduct special prayers. Then, the girls become possessed right after the 10am break.” He said he is getting used to hearing screams and shouts in school. The school administration, understandably, is said to be at its wit’s end to put an end to

the outbreaks. Besides the heat, the current theory is that the ‘bad spirits’ have been sent to the school by vengeful parents whose children were expelled from school.

REFERENCES

1 The schools were designated as SMK Pengkalan Chepa 2 (PC2), SMK Pengkalan Chepa 1 (PC1), SMK Kemumin (K), and SMK Kubang Kerman 3 (KK3). They are named after the city district they serve and fall within a three-mile (5km) radius. SMK is an abbreviation of the Malay for Secondary (*Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan*). I’ll use the bracketed initials, above, for brevity. These particular schools take both boys and girls but teach them separately. At the centre of this outbreak, PC2, the attendance of around 1,500 was divided almost equally between boys and girls.

2 Some reports attributed the same quote to different students, and some attributed them to the students generally. Much of the local reportage seemed to accept the reality of the supernatural events without question.

3 *Sinar Harian*, 13 April 2016.

4 A Quranic prayer traditionally recommended as a prophylactic against *djinn*.

5 Male and female teachers with higher qualifications in Islamic law.

6 Robert Bartholomew, *Mass Hysteria in Schools: A Worldwide History Since 1566* (2014), co-written with FT’s Bob Rickard.

7 *Al-Qalam* – Arabic: a pen – being a symbol for learning, writing and wisdom. Many Islamic institutions incorporate the word *qalam* into their title, especially if they provide advisory services interpreting Sharia law.

SOURCES

Astroawani (Malaysia) 14 April; *Free Malaysia Today Online (FMT)*, 17+19+20+27 April; *The Star Online (Malaysia)*, 11+13+14+15+17+18+19+25+27 April, 4+5+10 May; *New Straits Times*, 20 April, 5 May; *D.Mail*, 18 April; *BBC News*, *The Coverage* 19 April; *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mirror*, *Huffington Post*, 20 April 2016.

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Further news updates on dog treks, attacks on cows and cats, and post mortem sex...

CATTLE MUTILATION [FT336:22]



Mysterious cattle mutilations were a major feature of ufology in the 1970s and 1980s (see "Poor Cow", FT68:23-29), but

have become far less frequent in subsequent decades – or, at least, far less frequently reported. Targets for blame included satanic cults, extraterrestrials or covert government agents. Last winter, two cows were found mutilated in northeast Georgia. Harold Edge found one of his Black Angus cows dead in December and another on 6 January, with what appeared to be a half-circle cut around the anuses of both animals. Edge told the police there were no bite marks or indications of animal attacks. The cuts were clean, with no jagged edges. Jackson County sheriff's Capt. Rich Lott said investigators couldn't explain the deaths on Edge's pasture near Braselton. [AP] 15 Jan 2016.

SPECTROPHILIACS [FT336:12-13]



The actress Lynda Bellingham, the star of *Loose Women* whom older readers might remember

as the mum in the OXO television ads, died from colon cancer in October 2014, but over a year later, her husband Michael Pattemore, 60, revealed in an interview with *Spirit and Destiny* magazine that he makes love to her ghost in the north London flat they had shared – or at least that was his impression. Describing one intimate occasion, he said: "As her body snuggled into mine, I breathed the familiar scent of the woman I'd been lucky enough to spend 10 wonderful years with. 'Make love to me,' Lynda whispered, her face nuzzling into mine. Kissing her, I gazed down into those beautiful brown eyes. 'I love you,' she smiled, and I



ABOVE: Actress Lynda Bellingham, enjoying an active sex life from beyond the grave.

closed my eyes, luxuriating in the warmth of her low, husky voice." He was adamant that the actress had been there. "How could I have made love to my wife when she was no longer here? But I did, I was certain of it. I felt her, saw her and heard her... What was so strange about the idea of Lynda visiting me from the other side?" Two weeks after her death, he believes her spirit returned in the form of a white butterfly, which fluttered around at her funeral. Every month, he speaks to a medium, who he claims is adamant Lynda is still with him. *Sunday Mirror*, 10 Jan; *D.Mail*, 11 Jan 2016.

FOREVER BLOWING BUBBLES [FT143:6]



Scientists from the Arctic University of Norway have discovered strings of giant craters on the

seabed in the Barents Sea that they believe are caused by explosions of methane. The craters off Norway are up to half a mile (800m) wide and 150ft (46m) deep and appear

to have been created when gas seeped up from deep under the seabed, before bursting through into the water above. The Norwegian researchers claim such explosions could sink ships, and might explain marine disappearances in areas such as the supposed "Bermuda Triangle" (a marine region in the Caribbean so named by fortune writer Vincent Gaddis in 1965). The press presented this as a new idea, but it was floated in November 2000 following Alan Judd's investigation of the so-called Witch's Hole, located on the seabed 90 miles (145km) northeast of Aberdeen, near the wreck of a steel trawler found in one piece in the 1970s. *D.Telegraph*, *D.Mail*, 14 Mar 2016.

Research has shown that the mysterious craters recently found in the Yamal Peninsula and elsewhere in northern Siberia, up to 200ft (60m) deep, are the result of methane eruptions triggered by melting permafrost [FT202:23]. Previous theories for the craters, which have appeared overnight, included underground explosions and meteorites. [AFP] 13 Mar; *dailymail.co.uk*, 13 July 2015.

DOG TREKS [FT341:10-11]



• On 28 May 2007, Memorial Day, Doug Harmon of Scarborough, Maine, and another man

drowned after their boat capsized on Chamberlain Lake. The Harmon family's dog, a four-year-old black Labrador retriever called Molly, was presumed to have perished with the men, but over the next couple of weeks, she was spotted by rangers, campers and fishermen in various wilderness areas stretching from Wadleigh Pond, less than 20 miles (32km) from the Quebec border, to Scraggly Pond some 40 miles (64km) away. Fliers offering a \$200 reward for her return were placed at checkpoints in Maine's North Woods. On 15 June, Molly arrived at the Millinocket home of Alain and Bernadette Sirois, where she gobbled down everything they put in front of her. Believing that Molly belonged to a local family, the Siroises put up "found dog" posters, one of which was spotted by a woman who knew the story of Molly and she was reunited with family members three days later. Eyewitness accounts suggest the dog had travelled more than 200 miles (320km) over 18 days while putting up with rugged terrain, thick black flies and evading predators such as coyotes. Her safe return was all the more touching because of her close relationship with Harmon's three children, ages eight, 12 and 14. She had lost a lot of weight but otherwise appeared to be in good shape. [AP] 19 June 2007.

• Gidget, a seven-year-old Jack Russell terrier, went missing from her home near Philadelphia on 22 April 2014. More than four months later, she was found wandering a suburb of Portland, Oregon, more than 3,000 miles (4,800km) from Philadelphia. She was thin but otherwise healthy. A microchip allowed workers at an animal shelter to find her

owner. PetLink, manufactures the microchip, paid for her flight home. *irishexaminer.com*, 20 Sept 2014.

• For four years, Kelly Booker was not sure whether someone stole his beloved dog Lilly, or whether the nine-year-old Shih Tzu got spooked by Fourth of July fireworks and never found her way back to her home in Denver, Colorado. Then in April 2015, Lilly was found wandering the streets of Elgin, Illinois. How the dog made the 900-mile (1,450km) journey was a mystery. She had a severe ear infection and matted fur, and had evidently been running for some time. The animal shelter where she was taken found a microchip and she was reunited with Brooker. *Chicago Tribune*, 7 May 2015.

CAT ATTACKS [FT341:4]



Since last November, 12 cats have returned home to their owners in the Cotswolds with patches of fur missing and Gloucestershire police are investigating amid concerns that a cat shaver could be at large – no doubt about it, one would have thought. The incidents occurred within a six-mile (10km) radius in villages near Gatcombe Park, the 18th century estate owned by Princess Anne. Some of the cats have been shaved as many as four times. The latest victim was tortoiseshell Tippi, who had come home twice in the past two weeks with her fur shaved off. Owner Lysetta Bray, 56, who lives near Chalford, said Tippi was first targeted just before Christmas when she came home with a shaved patch from her belly to her leg. Beau, a ginger tabby belonging to John Kerry in Minchinhampton, was shaved four times in February. “An element of animal cruelty could be considered if the cat was injured or distressed,” said a police spokesman. “But if the cat keeps coming back home with shaved patches, this would suggest it keeps going back to whoever is doing it by choice. It could also be classed as criminal

damage as the cat is somebody’s property.”

Between 12 February and 10 March, at least five cats in Cinderford, Gloucestershire, were killed or injured so badly that they had to be put down. The dead have included one headless cat in a cul-de-sac, another with its front legs missing and a third covered in suspected bullet holes. “We’ve received information this may be part of an initiation test for a local gang of teenagers,” said a police spokesman. *D.Mail*, *irishexaminer.com*, 1 Mar; *Western Daily Press*, 14 Mar 2016.

BOGUS SOCIAL WORKERS [FT341:23]



The two teenage girls who attempted to kidnap newborn babies using Facebook have been jailed.

Schoolfriends Holly Kelland, 18, and Codie Farrar, 17, were sentenced to 12 months’ detention and training orders. Farrar, of Evesham, Worcestershire, said Kelland had recruited her to pose as a social worker in order to snatch a baby. Kelland created a fake scan to trick people (including her mother) into believing she was pregnant. Police said she had a “fully equipped” nursery at her home. *D.Telegraph*, 21 May 2016.

DEATH FROM ABOVE? [FT338:22]



Initial reports asserted that bus driver V Kamraj, 40, was killed by a falling meteorite in Natrampalli, Tamil Nadu, India, on 6 February, but the explosion that killed him is now thought to be terrestrial in origin. According to that paragon of reliability, the *Sunday Sport* (14 Feb 2016) – which called him Kamaraj Prabakar, a 52-year-old father of three – he had just scooped almost £100,000 on the state lottery and was on the way to his work to tell his boss that he was quitting when “he was hit and killed instantly by the red hot space rock”. Yeah, right.

102: TOO SOON TO TELL



The myth

Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai – or possibly Mao Zedong, or if not him, then probably the ever-quotable Mahatma Gandhi – when asked what he thought was the lasting effect of the French Revolution, replied “It is too soon to tell.” In doing so, he epitomised the difference between the short-termism of Western thought and the timeless, patient profundity of the Eastern mind.

The “truth”

Until recently, many of us assumed that the famous quote was apocryphal, sitting alongside the as-yet-untraced Gandhi line, “I think it would be a good idea,” in response to “What do you think of Western civilization?” However, following research by historians in the archives of the Chinese foreign ministry, it now appears that Zhou Enlai did indeed utter the remark – but in reply to a misunderstood or mistranslated question. During US President Nixon’s historic visit to China in 1972, Zhou thought US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was asking his views, not on the events of 1789, but on “Les Evenements” of May 1968, when the French Republic was briefly rocked by widespread strikes, occupations and protests. His answer was therefore sensible, diplomatic, and utterly lacking in quote-worthy philosophical insight.

Sources

<https://next.ft.com/content/74916db6-938d-11e0-922e-00144feab49a>; <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/04/23/good-idea/>.

Disclaimer

Is it too early to declare this story debunked? If you have reason to think so, please explain why at our own version of Democracy Wall – the letters pages.

Mythchaser

Amongst the many unlikely stories told about Adolf Hitler, one of our favourites has recently resurfaced: the idea that, while convalescing from his WW1 wounds, he played a game of cricket against some British PoWs, and promptly tried to change the rules to make the sport “more manly”. But as cricket historian Simon Sweetman has pointed out (*The Cricket Paper*, 13 May 2016), the only known source for this daft tale is a 1930 newspaper article written by a pro-Nazi Conservative MP. Unless any reader can tell us otherwise...



DON'T MISS MYTHCONCEPTIONS THE BOOK
OUT NOW ONLINE AND IN ALL GOOD BOOKSHOPS

FALLEN ANGEL

THE ARRIVAL OF AN UNLIKELY INFLATABLE GUEST ON A REMOTE INDONESIAN ISLAND PROMPTS MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND A VISIT FROM THE MAINLAND POLICE

It was an auspicious event that stunned Indonesians first and then quickly spread globally on the Internet. Just “days after a solar eclipse”, an angel had fallen out of the sky into the Molucca Sea, to the east of the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. It was found “on a beach” by fishermen and taken back to their village on the island of Banggai in Indonesia.

As reported in the *Malaysian Daily*, “The villagers were said to be excited after a fisherman spotted the ‘beautiful, lonely angel’ on the beach.” He took the celestial beauty home to his mother, who clothed it and set it in a chair. Regional reportage used the Malay word *bidadari* – meaning angel, but also fairy. The villagers remained enchanted with their divine guest until police detectives from the mainland arrived. Police chief Heru Pramukarno had to explain that it was a ‘Dutch wife’. “They have no Internet, they don’t know what a sex toy is,” he told AFP, and confiscated the angelic impostor “to keep the false rumours from spreading.”

Once the guffaws had subsided, it was clear that there was probably a bit more to the story. For a start, the solar eclipse occurred on 8/9 March – about eight weeks earlier, not mere “days” as all the reportage had it. This was a total eclipse whose central track was directly over the Sulawesi Islands, with its maximum lasting just over four minutes at 01:59 UTC (Coordinated Universal Time) on 9 March 2016.

Banggai Island is located in the Molucca Sea, to the east of Sulawesi’s central province, in the Kepulauan Banggai archipelago. For many years it was only accessible by local ferry services. Modern development has been driven by the acclaimed beauty of its reefs and clarity of its waters, drawing divers from all over the world. Its chief religion is said to be animism, which has absorbed elements of both Christianity and Islam. The Indonesian police, with their Islamic governance, naturally took an interest in the story, which not only had a theological dimension but, as they put it, talk of an ‘angel’ “might have sparked social unrest”.

From the AFP agency we learn that the fisherman who found the deflated angel the day after the eclipse is called Pardin – many Indonesians elect to go by a single name. But such is the isolation of Banggai that gossip took a long time to reach the mainland. The deeply spiritual people, says AFP, were “superstitious enough to believe



ABOVE: The “angel”, respectfully attired and sitting in chair, and in the hands of the police on their boat.

the two events were linked.” A local news agency, Pojok Satu, cited by the *Telegraph*, puts another date to the discovery of the “angel child” – 19 April, which is 40 days – not one day – after the eclipse. “This angel child was found face down, crying and naked, covered only a white cloth,” it reported.

Pardin, with impeccable native hospitality, brought the doll home to his mother, in the village of Kalupapi, in the island’s southern tip. She respectfully “stuffed the doll with fabric and gave it a fresh change of clothes and headscarf

every day,” and even a chair to sit on, presumably to facilitate audiences with curious villagers. Inspector Pramukarno added that his men heard many local stories about the ‘angel’ such as “[she] was crying when she was discovered.”

Many of the photos taken by the police, ‘leaked’ later, don’t seem as respectful as the Kalupapi villagers; once on their boat back, they couldn’t resist taking ‘selfies’ with the ‘fallen angel’. *D.Telegraph*, 1 May; *D.Mail*, 2 May; *Times*, *BBC News*, *Huffington Post*, *Rappler (Indonesia)*, *New Straits Times*, *Malaysian Daily*, 3 May 2016.

A^z ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the cryptozoological garden

TODD JURASEK AND BRIAN IRWIN



IT'S DINO-BIGFOOT!

During late December 2015 through early January 2016, Australian cryptozoologist Brian Irwin and American cryptid investigator Todd Jurasek were visiting the island of New Britain (plus some of its tiny off-lying islets), situated just east of New Guinea in the Bismarck Archipelago, pursuing reports of living dinosaurs. One of the most remarkable accounts received by them, however, may well have featured something totally different but no less intriguing – New Guinea's very own, little-known, bigfoot. Here is what Todd wrote about it in a report he sent me:

Crocodile Point. Brian and I looked into a story of a man (Graham Sangeo) who reportedly had fed fish to a small bipedal dinosaur for years near Crocodile Point. The animal turned out to be a male primate of some sort that walked primarily on two legs according to our guide Leo Sangeo, Graham's father. He guided us to the cave, which is currently abandoned. Leo described the creature as brown coloured, about 1-1.5m tall, with big muscular arms and shoulders. The arms were shorter than the legs and its knees and big legs could be seen. The animal's feet were like a dog's hind feet with five toes (I asked Leo repeatedly about this feature to make sure I understood him correctly), it had a very small to no tail, and canines like a monkey or ape. The creature would come down out of the cave at night [and] scrounge around, walking on two legs at least a part of the time. It could be seen at times seemingly staring out to sea as if watching the horizon. Leo and Graham and a few others would attach cooked fish to tall branches and lift them up to it. It would then eat the food out of its hands. Leo said the animal grew bigger over time. The creature eventually brought two babies. He said he never saw the female. I'm not sure if the others saw the female or not. Graham discovered the creature in 2011, feeding it until he left for school in 2014 or 2015; others continued afterward but eventually stopped and the creature disappeared. Based on the description I'm inclined to believe this was a small ape of some sort, or possibly a small bigfoot-like creature. I was told by at least one other person

along the distant Andru River that wild hairy men could be found in the Whitman range.

No species of monkey or ape is known from anywhere in or around New Guinea, but there have long been reports from here of a mysterious miniature bigfoot-like creature known locally as the *kayadi*. So if such a creature truly exists, perhaps this is what Sangeo had been feeding. Todd and Brian have asked me to announce that if anyone reading this account has information concerning mystery beasts from New Britain and its outlying islets, please contact them via Todd's email address: hunterfox743@gmail.com *Todd Jurasek, pers. comm., 27 Mar 2016.*

TEARING APART SOME PTEROSAURS

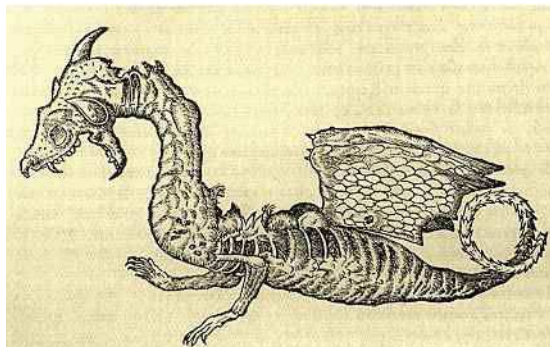
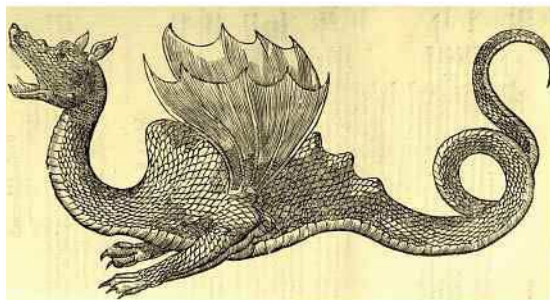
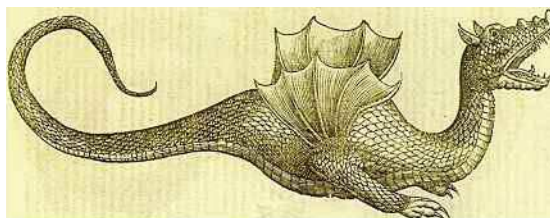
Based on surviving illustrations of the specimens in question, some cryptozoological researchers have boldly speculated that certain preserved 'winged dragons' variously seen or owned by the likes of French naturalist Pierre Belon (1517-1564), Italian naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605), and Cardinal Francesco Barberini (1597-1679), nephew of Pope Urban VIII, were actually recently deceased pterosaurs. Three in particular have attracted

keen interest. The first specimen was one of several alleged winged dragons that Belon claimed to have seen in embalmed form while visiting Egypt, and a drawing of which he published in 1557, variations later appearing in other writers' works too. The second was supposedly a mummified African dragon presented to Aldrovandi as a gift by Francisco Centensis and later depicted directly by Aldrovandi's painters in colour. The third was also a gift, but this time from King Louis XIII of France to Cardinal Barberini, and was depicted in a detailed drawing by Lyncean anatomist Giovanni Faber in the multi-authored *Thesaurus of Medicinal Treasures of New Spain* (1651). None of these specimens still exists, but many of the illustrations of them do. Moreover, the extensive degree of morphological detail captured in these images has enabled Fayetteville State University biologist Dr Phil Senter, working with Indiana University comparative literature expert Dr Darius M Klein, to analyse and identify with a high degree of confidence these specimens' true natures – and in so doing confirm that none of them was any form of pterosaur, modern-day or otherwise. Yet this fascinating study has only lately attracted notable public media attention. So what did they discover? Quoting from the abstract for the *Palaeontologia Electronica* paper in which they documented their investigation, their eye-opening findings are as follows:

Comparison with extant animals reveals that Belon's and Aldrovandi's dragons are decapitated snakes with attached mammal heads. Their wings are the pectoral fins of flying gurnards (Dactylopterus volitans). Their 'legs' are the forelimbs of rabbits or canids in reptile-skin sleeves. The dragon illustrated by Faber and owned by Cardinal Francesco Barberini includes the skull of a weasel (Mustela nivalis), the belly skin of a snake, the dorsal and lateral skin of a lizard, and the tail skeleton of an eel (Anguilla anguilla). These hoaxes now join the list of discredited 'proofs' of human-pterosaur coexistence.

After more than four centuries, a trio of would-be pterosaurs has been torn apart by a level of deduction so forensic in its detail and depth that even the great Sherlock Holmes would have approved (had he ever existed, of course!). <http://palaeo-electronica.org/content/2014/967-late-surviving-pterosaurs>

LEFT: Here be dragons – the beasts of Belon, Aldrovandi and Barberini.





NECROLOG

This month, we bid a fond farewell to the apostate leader of Malaysia's Sky Kingdom 'Teapot Cult', an artificial intelligence pioneer and the man who invented the @ sign



ARIFFIN MUHAMAD

was the leader of Malaysia's 'Teapot Cult'. In July 2005, a group of masked vigilantes – who still have not been identified – raided the hill-top compound of the Sky Kingdom sect, smashing and burning some of its curious buildings, including giant models of a teapot, vase, umbrella and concrete boat which had taken years – and around RM5million (approx. \$1.3 million or £900,000) – to build; see **FT200:13**. Two days later 58 sect members were arrested; so were three of the sect leader's four wives. The leader himself – Ariffin Muhammad, known to his flock as 'Ayah Pin' ('ayah' is a Malay honorific like 'grandfather') – escaped and remained a fugitive for the next 11 years.

Ariffin was born in 1943 (or maybe 1946) into a Muslim Malay family in the Beris Kubor Besar *kampung*, in Kelantan state. At the age of 10, he claimed that an angel had visited him while he was seriously ill. Twenty years later, the angel returned, urging him to begin his career as a spiritual leader. He was joined by Hassan Tuhan (later known as 'Anak Rimau' or 'Child of the Tiger') who also claimed divine contact, and together they founded the 'Sky Kingdom' sect (in Malay: *Kerajaan Langit*).

He moved to Hulu Besut, in the neighbouring state of Terengganu, in early 1975. In the mid-1980s, the group acquired a remote site near Kampung Batu 13 and began the construction of their compound, including the huge

devotional structures whose design had been divinely revealed. Ariffin claimed to be able to make himself invisible and to kill a man using the power of thought.

In his sermons Ariffin declared that the celestial Sky Kingdom had given him the power and the right to unite people of the world, irrespective of their religion. Muslims were particularly outraged by his claim that God was human; that their traditional Friday prayers were not compulsory; and that his followers regarded him as God. In fact, Ariffin was believed to be a reincarnation of Shiva, Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed. He said his 'inter-faith' teaching welcomed members from other faiths, and emphasised tolerance.

The compound's devotional structures were said to combine architectural elements from Islam, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism, and were inspired by the shamanic journeys (one report called them "dreams") of an unnamed follower. Quite possibly this was Hassan Tuhan, who saw the originals in the celestial realm, including the Teapot from which God poured his blessings as 'holy water' upon mankind. The blue Vase receives the water and the Well supplies the Teapot. There is a concrete boat representing the *Bahtera Nabi Noh* (Noah's Ark); a golden Umbrella-shaped building, 23ft (7m) high, representing shelter under God and the Nine-Planet gods of Hinduism. A small graveyard hosts the tomb of Mohamad Ya (11 Aug 1950 – 3 Oct 2003) another of the sect's founders who had visited the Sky Kingdom in the sky.

Perhaps most curious of all is a large crescent-shaped structure dedicated to "peoples who do not have any religion" including *Orang Asli* (more than 10 distinct indigenous groups of people descended from the peninsula's earliest inhabitants), and *Orang Bunian*, the nearest translation of which is 'supernatural beings of the jungle'. They were supposed to be invisible to most and only seen by enlightened men or shamans; Ayah Pin claimed he communicated with them regularly.

While freedom of worship is guaranteed under the secular constitution since 1957 when British rule was relinquished, the Muslim majority in Malaysia is governed by Sharia law and Islamic judicial courts which take precedence in religious matters. A particularly harsh view is taken of apostasy in these courts, and any attempt to renounce Islam is regarded as 'deviant' behaviour and a criminal insult to the religion.

A number of the founders and followers of Sky Kingdom did declare their apostasy – a very dangerous thing to do – enduring the wrath of the Sharia courts for more than 30 years. In 1986, the Terengganu state Religious and Malay Customs Council Fatwa Committee ruled that the Sky Kingdom teachings were "deviant and conflicted with Islam". Two years later, four members were jailed for two years for apostasy. In 2000, the Islamic Party of Terengganu moved again to close down Sky Kingdom. The following year Ariffin himself was declared an apostate for leaving Islam and spent 11 months in prison in 2001 for 'deviant' activities. Sect member and former teacher Mrs Kamariah Ali, 57, was convicted twice, in 1992 and 2005, for not "repenting or [being] willing to abandon any teachings contrary to Islam", despite – as her lawyer declared – "informing the court that she is not a Muslim and doesn't come under Sharia court any more." And so on.

Due to a series of health problems, including a stroke, Ariffin returned in early 2016 from his 11-year exile (supposedly in Thailand). He had four wives, the first being the titular owner of the compound land. He died at the home of his third wife, Che Jaharah Awang, at the Batu 13 *kampung* near Hulu Besut, and was buried in the *kampung* cemetery. The faithful are said to believe that he will return one day as the Imam Mahdi.

Ariffin Muhammad (aka 'Ayah Pin') founder of the Sky Kingdom sect, born in 1943 (or 1946) at Bachok in Kelantan State; died at Hulu Besut, Terengganu State, Malaysia, 23 April 2016, aged 73 (or 70).

MARVIN MINSKY

In 1958 Marvin Minsky co-founded the Artificial Intelligence Project at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), with his colleague John McCarthy, who is credited with coining the term "artificial intelligence". Subsequently known as the AI Lab, it became a magnet for AI researchers. Prof Minsky's works included *Steps Towards Artificial Intelligence* (1960), a manifesto that profoundly shaped AI in its earliest days, and *Society of Mind* (1985), which postulated that the brain is fundamentally an assembly of interacting, specialised, autonomous agents for tasks such as visual processing and knowledge management. That view of the architecture of the mind remains a cornerstone of AI research. His last book, *The Emotion Machine* (2006), written for the lay reader as much as the specialist, sought to understand how "thinking" works, and to explain such phenomena as consciousness and common sense.

Prof Minsky had a long friendship with the physicist Richard Feynman, and helped Stanley Kubrick with his 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, for which he advised (somewhat optimistically) on the capabilities of the HAL computer. An accomplished pianist, he delighted in improving complex baroque fugues – and in 1981, wrote an influential paper on the connections between music, psychology and the mind. "Marvin was one of the very few people in computing whose visions and perspectives liberated the computer from being a glorified adding machine to start to realise its destiny as one of the most powerful amplifiers for human endeavours in history," said his friend and colleague, the computer scientist Alan Kay.

In a 2007 interview, Prof Minsky was asked: "If we developed the perfect artificial brain, what would be the difference between that and the real thing?" To which he replied: "Well, it wouldn't die. Some

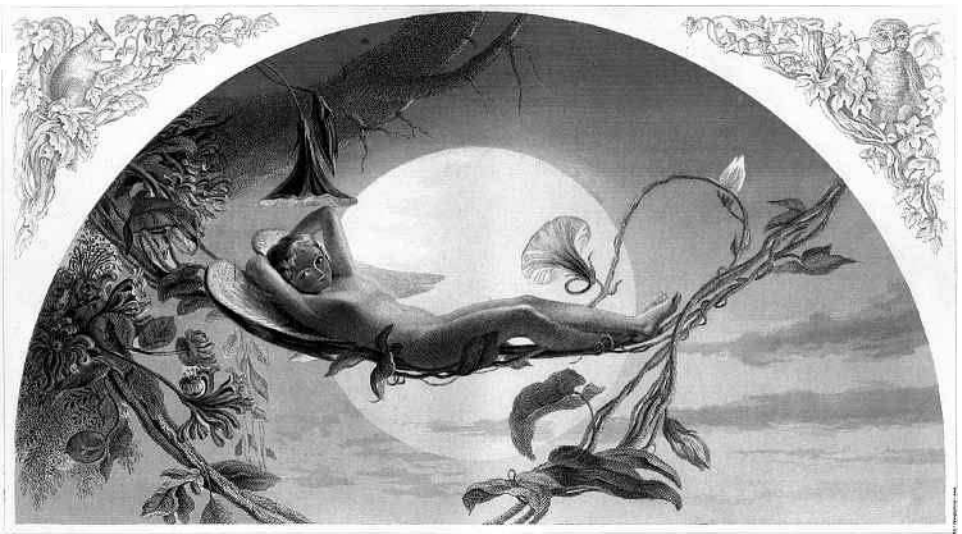
people believe that you should die, and some people think dying is a nuisance. I'm one of the latter. So I think we should get rid of death." The Grim Reaper disagreed.

Marvin Lee Minsky, mathematician and computer scientist, born New York 9 Aug 1927; died Boston 24 Jan 2016, aged 88.

RAY TOMLINSON

The first electronic messaging system, developed in the 1960s, would only allow messages to be exchanged between users on the same computer. Then in 1969, the American Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) launched the Arpanet, a program designed to create a network tying together disparate computer science programs it was funding around the country. This was the Internet's precursor. In 1971 Ray Tomlinson (below) was working for the Boston-based technology company Bolt, Beranek and Newman (now called Raytheon), a major contractor on the Arpanet, trying (as he put it) "to find things to use this new-fangled network for". He had heard about a proposal to send messages to be printed and stuffed in mailboxes for people to read, and had the idea that messages should go to computers instead. Borrowing a code from a file-transfer program he had created called Cypnet, he modified an existing internal computer-messaging program so that messages could be sent between two machines that were side-by-side. Needing a punctuation symbol to separate the name of the recipient from his/her computer location, Tomlinson chose @, the "at sign", recently named the asperand or ampersat. Prior to this, @ usually meant "at the rate of"; its origin is obscure, though it dates back at least to the 14th century. Tomlinson didn't consider his messaging system to be significant. "Don't tell anyone! This isn't what we're supposed to be working on," he told a colleague. However, email quickly matured from a fun idea to a central feature of the Arpanet – and later the Internet. Tomlinson lived in Lincoln, Massachusetts, where he and his partner Karen raised miniature sheep. He was described by a friend as "surprisingly, not addicted to email."

Raymond Samuel Tomlinson, email inventor, born Amsterdam (NY) 23 April 1941; died Lincoln (MA) (suspected heart attack) 5 Mar 2016, aged 74.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

A HUNGRY WITCH

It is one of the most extraordinary witchcraft trials on record. A woman managed to convince a series of townsfolk that she could bring their departed relatives back to life. The relatives were taken along to see their dead family members, as they slowly returned to the world. These relatives were then so convinced of the reality of what they had experienced that they refused to help the authorities in the trial that followed.

This would be an extraordinary series of events in 1600 in the Balkans or on the upper Rhine, but incredibly it took place in 1864 in Ireland! The 'witch', as she was widely referred to in the press, was one Mary Doheny and she was put on trial not for pacts with the Devil, but for swindling the good folk of Carrick-on-Suir in Tipperary with her resurrection games. She was sent to prison rather than the gallows.

Mary was not a witch as most of us understand the word: she would be better described as a 'fairy doctor'. The individuals whom she brought back from the dead were not, according to Mary, carol singing in a Christian afterlife; rather they were with the fairies – a belief occasionally found in rural Ireland in the 19th century. Mary claimed that to bring the dead back from the fey she had to feed them up over a long period of

time, and rather than asking for money she requested food from her clients. There is no question that there was swindling in Mary's schemes: she had one of the dead complain that the tea sent by living relatives was not of good enough quality! But there remains the question of how she convinced the men and

women who claimed that they saw their dead relatives. One of the witnesses in the trial, for example, was a local policeman who courageously spoke against the prosecutor, telling the court that he had seen his own dead father-in-law.

Establishing the truth of what happened before the trial would take a lot of research: in fact, there is a great book waiting to be written on the Doheny case if someone out there is interested. It seems

that Mary would take her clients to an open space where they would see the dead walk before them, although clients did not talk to the dead. How far off were these half-phantoms? Did Mary use tricks of suggestion or the clothes of those who had passed on to create this effect? As anyone who has perused the annals of witchcraft, shamanism and spirit healing will know, many operators create a bewildering cocktail of low trickery and the paranormal. Where one begins and where the other ends is difficult to judge, and the practitioners themselves often seem to lose track.

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

THE INDIVIDUALS
MARY DOHENY
BROUGHT BACK
FROM THE DEAD
WERE NOT IN THE
AFTERLIFE BUT
WITH THE FAIRIES



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FLYING SORCERY

PETER BROOKESMITH PRESENTS HIS REGULAR SURVEY OF THE LATEST FADS AND FLAPS FROM THE WORLD OF UFOLOGY

THE OLD STUFF

Like ufology, the Internet is both a terrible and a wonderful thing. These two excrescences of the post-modern age have, over the last couple of decades, inevitably influenced each other. On the one hand, the Internet has made it possible to take apart current claims, bogus photos, daft assertions and very dodgy characters at unprecedented speed. One might cite by way of recent examples the over-hyped video of some Chilean insects (as touted by Leslie Kean among others) and the desperate promotion of a couple of old snapshots of a mummified child as pictures of an alien corpse retrieved from the deserts of New Mexico seven or so decades ago. That ripe plum was supported by several people who should have known better. Deconstruction of such trumpery happens so quickly simply – and obviously – because more people are in touch with one another and can exchange and publish findings so much faster than in the days when we relied on the phone, the mails, and newsletters or magazines – and can do so internationally in seconds flat.

On the other hand, and not so paradoxically, this has left whatever passes these days for mainstream ufology somewhat stuck in its own mud. Present, ephemeral excitements being risky bets for those who cling to the idea that we're being visited by aliens of some kind, ufologists continue to grind out arguments that ancient, apparently high-strangeness cases are just as strange as they have ever been made to seem. And skeptics continue to gnaw away at their claims. Roswell is the obvious case in point. So is the equally egregious Rendlesham Forest incident. Both continue to generate high-octane, high-temperature debates pro and con, and mostly on-line. Obsession and paranoia over the Great Abduction Scare seems to have died down, but also, since the demise or disgrace of its major proponents, it has fibrillated into a spectrum of direct, first-person accounts. These are often intriguing in their own right, for a spectrum of reasons: they are also mostly at striking odds in their idiosyncracies with the interpretations of abductionist panjandrum, past and present. An irony herein is that this general truth has long been available to anyone bothered to read



These days, mainstream ufology is stuck in its own mud

Nigel Watson's and Martin Kottmeyer's writings on close encounters over the years.

One symptom of this reliance on 'old stuff' is that discussion has become a kind of trench warfare, with neither side able to out-manoeuvre the other and, one does sometimes wonder, unwilling to do so as well. This is no more than par for the course with unofficial knowledge, of course, as Dr Ed Bullard pointed out aeons (it seems now) ago. Perhaps I am jaded as well as jaundiced, but the tendency seems to have become more ingrained over the past couple of decades. Another symptom is a rise in the stamp-collecting tendency in ufology. This has never been absent from the field: there have always been people who with varying degrees of diligence have catalogued UFO sightings and encounters. Many of these have been telegraphic and thus essentially useless summaries of rather dull events, but some more thorough individuals have as a result of their own detailed compilations produced provocative, insightful and entertaining analyses of what they've found (Martin

Kottmeyer, Peter Rogerson and Luis Gonzales spring to mind in the abduction department). Tim Printy, in *SUNlite*, has begun an ambitious project to dissect cases from both Project Blue Book and the Don Berliner/NICAP catalogue *The UFO Evidence*. Sometimes, trivial as a case may appear, the work involved is laborious, and Printy is admirably meticulous. As a result he does not dismiss all these cases as 'explained', but he does suggest the most likely solution – and has, as yet, to find anything that suggests an extraterrestrial presence in our skies.

Tim Printy's fastidious dedication calls into question the usefulness of the stamp-collecting tendency in ufology. There are ufologists who are also philatelists, and I make no aspersion against the collecting instinct *per se*.

Let me explain why one of my eyebrows is nonetheless raised. Sweden's AFU is busy (not to say overwhelmed) collecting archives and publications involving all manner of ufological and fortean research; Isaac Koi is trying to track down and make publicly available searchable PDFs of every ufological fanzine, along with huge collections of newspaper clippings, published in English; Paul Dean has begun to document all of the USAF North American Air Defense Command's dealings with UFO reports, scheduled to total some 20 lengthy blogs... No doubt there are other such games afoot. On the face of it these are admirable undertakings, but only those expecting to live longer than Noah – should they not have other things to do – will ever wade their way through all this stuff (Paul Dean's efforts perhaps apart). Certainly no one is going to bother to get behind that vast mass of UFO reports that essentially say (approximately to quote Jacques Vallée) "Mrs Wilson saw a light in the sky", the kind of insufficient information that filled so many flying-saucer clubs' newsletters.

Obviously, collections and catalogues have their uses. When I needed to consult Buck Nelson's now very rare *My Trip to Mars, the Moon and Venus*, AFU provided not the photocopy I was expecting, but an original. These depositories of information are invaluable for those on a specific research track. That implies a good deal of prior knowledge, thought, and planning. If you want to just 'find out about UFOs', though, they wouldn't be the best place to start.

WE ARE THE MIB

Last issue, (**FT341:24**) we reported on the death of Albert K Bender, the man who started the legend of the 'men in black' – intimidators who seek to silence those reporting something odd in the sky. But how has this fortan sideshow manifested itself in the UK? As you might suspect, the answer is differently!

British witnesses to close encounters have also reported visits from strangers, just as in the USA, but not surprisingly these accounts have a quirky flavour that seems to mirror our national ethos. I have investigated around 20 cases and it is worth contrasting them with the far better known American examples.

Several themes recur – such as there being two men who approach a witness together, often knowing about a case that has not been publicised and asking sophisticated, probing questions that persuade witnesses they are who they claim to be. They often arrive in a large, old British car (a Jaguar, commonly). One of the two men either stays silent or acts weirdly whilst the other shows an impressive awareness of the nuances of the unreported case. When they offer an explanation for the visit, they often refer to the police or Ministry of Defence, or occasionally a UFO organisation (that turns out not to exist when looked into afterwards).

Peculiar behaviour is also common. In one case, the two men referred to one another using numbers, not names. Another insisted he should only be addressed as 'commander' and gushed about knowing Winston Churchill. One man sat in the far corner for hours holding a black box that had no moving parts and appeared to do nothing.

Witnesses are usually 'advised' not to talk about their sighting. On one occasion, the MIB sent away local reporters who had been invited by the witnesses. Sometimes simple, plausible sounding explanations are used to request silence: "It was just a balloon", in one case. In another, the witness was visited by two MoD investigators, who told him that what he had seen was a Russian satellite passing high overhead – even though it never crossed the UK that night. The absurdity of the Ministry visiting over such a trivial thing was only matched when – after the witness did talk to a UFO group – a large black Jaguar parked outside his house for several nights. The witness asked for help; luckily, one of the group had a relative in the police force who agreed to check the situation out after being told only that the man lived near a large factory and that the car might be planning a robbery there. The police saw the car and traced its registration plate as false. They were told to get details from the driver, but as they walked towards the big black Jaguar it vanished into thin air in front of their eyes. Needless to say, the police officers decided not to file any report on this incident.

Over the years I have had experiences that made me wonder whether someone was putting me under observation. In 1983, I was investigating the Rendlesham Forest case (see **FT336–340**) – just as it had made the front page of the *News of the World* – when



A dark, old-fashioned Jaguar car was right outside

I received some strange phone calls with odd clicking noises. Parked at the end of our small road was what looked to be a telephone van and some men who were staring in my direction. I contacted the phone company to ask if they were working on my line. They checked, but had no record – but I insisted they *did* have a van out there. I was asked for its registration so I went outside and the van promptly drove off. There were no further problems on my phone line.

Was I being spied upon by some sinister agency desperate to listen in to my thoughts on this big case, or was it just a coincidence? Most likely the latter.

Then, also in connection with Rendlesham, was the saga of the Halt tape, a recording made live in the forest by the then base deputy commander as he and several other USAF personnel studied ground traces and observed UFOs. I knew of its existence soon after the sightings in December 1980, but it stayed secret for some years. I first received a copy in the summer of 1984, as did several colleagues, and we staged a press conference organised by Ralph Noyes, a friendly retired Under Secretary at the Ministry of Defence.

Later, a man calling himself Tom Adams, who said he was making a BBC radio documentary about the case, contacted me. He asked to come and interview me and I found him remarkably perceptive about the case – especially for a journalist. He was particularly keen to quiz me about non-alien explanations for the sighting and the possibility of secret military technology as the cause. I had suspicions in that regard but was astounded that a reporter knew of them.

Adams then surprised me by asking to take the Halt tape away with him. I offered him a copy, but he insisted it had to be the original. I pointed out that mine was a copy, just a first generation one, but he said it was necessary to use it for clarity on air. He actually became very fixated on this request and in the end I

gave him a copy and told him it was the original – which seemed to satisfy him. He gave me the date and channel when his programme would be airing and assured me that he would return the tape by registered post (as he believed it was precious, of course). But it never arrived and the programme did not air on the BBC that week.

I chased this as far as I could – through the contact details I had insisted on getting before handing over the tape. But nobody there had ever heard of him and I went right up to the head of commissioning at the station, who was adamant they had not discussed any such programme or had any dealings with this man. I never heard from Tom Adams again, and never got the tape back. I do wonder if this was a tactic somebody used to get me to talk freely about a subject in a way I would have been reticent about if approached by some secret service branch staffed by MIB. Or am I reading too much into a chancer who never got commissioned and decided not to fess up?

Something similarly odd happened during another case that I was involved in researching – the close encounter of Todmorden police officer Alan Godfrey (see my columns in **FT325–328**). I was writing about his encounter in 1982 when instant communication was not possible so, to check what I was writing with Alan, I read my work chapter by chapter onto a cassette tape and sent it to him to listen to and get back with comments on anything I'd got wrong.

Somehow, this method of communication was discovered and Alan was ordered to desist from interacting in this way. The 'investigating officer' wanted access to my tapes, which Alan fortuitously did not possess and denied any knowledge of. Neither of us had discussed openly what we were doing and we were rather taken aback by this. But police sources later denied they had – or would ever have – asked for private property in this way.

Aside from all these odd events, have I ever actually met an MIB? Well, perhaps.

In January 1997, as I was writing a book about Bender and similar cases, I visited the bank in Buxton, Derbyshire, where I lived. Right outside sat a ufologist's worst nightmare: a dark, old-fashioned Jaguar car of the kind I had so often heard described to me. It bore a London registration dating back to 1962, as if it had come straight out of one of my older cases. Standing next to it was a man in a smart dark suit staring at me as I left the bank – no doubt observing my open-mouthed expression at this sudden encounter.

It would have been easy to scuttle by and thus avoid any threats urging me to cease writing my book – and then I would have had a proper MIB legend to tell you about. Instead, here is the prosaic truth: I stopped and smiled at the man, and as we talked it quickly became clear that he was the owner of a beautifully restored classic car that he was taking to the Peak District to put on show.

In this case, all the components were present, but my hasty conclusion as to their MIB origin was entirely inside my head. How often is that true in other classic stories from MIB lore, I wonder?

GHOST HUNT AT THE 'HOUSE OF SUICIDES'

Andrew Green began his career as a ghosthunter in 1944 while still just a teenager - but his first investigation of a haunted house nearly proved to be his last. **ALAN MURDIE** digs into the strange history of 16 Montpelier Road and the curious photograph taken by Andrew that day...

Is there a figure in the window of this empty Victorian house, photographed in September 1944?

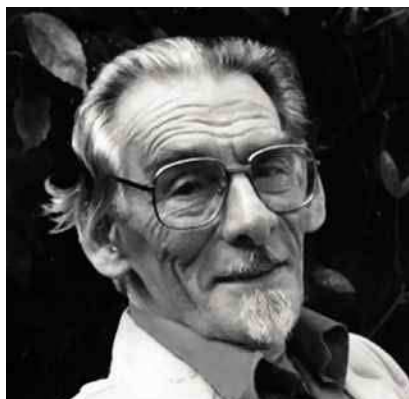
Is it the image of a girl who killed herself in 1887?

Did the haunting play a part in the multiple suicides that reputedly occurred at the house?

The man who asked himself these questions for some 60 years was the influential British ghost hunter Andrew Green (1927-2004, pictured at right), who took this odd photograph (shown on facing page) on his first ever attempt at investigating a haunted house. It marked the start of a life-long pursuit of the paranormal. Although he was highly sceptical by the standards of many investigators today, there was one final, dramatic question that Green seldom shared:

Was this the ghost that nearly killed me?

Normally, ghost research is a fairly safe activity, at least when utilising routine investigative techniques, many of them first popularised in Britain by Green himself in the early 1970s.¹ No physical harm comes from reading books on the subject or carrying out archival studies, and there's no danger in looking at alleged ghost photographs and film footage or visiting haunted houses in the daylight. More challenging are overnight investigations, which involve the same degree of risk as many other activities carried out in darkness in unfamiliar premises. But conducted sensibly, usually as team exercises, ghost



hunts involve far fewer physical risks than many sporting and outdoor activities and harm seldom occurs; and although people can get nervous or frightened, cases of ghost hunters receiving severe shocks are few and far between. Lethal ghosts surely belong to folklore, MR James stories and films like *The Ring* and *The Woman in Black*. The same can be said about seeking ghosts at séances - the philosopher of science CD Broad considered that there was no more danger involved than in attending university.² Andrew Green himself repeatedly emphasised that apparitions were harmless and worked hard to dissolve the fears and superstitions which have accumulated over the centuries.

But the story of his very first investigation may be seen as an exception. Although a prime example of 'beginner's luck', it was a case that made a profound impression on

Green for the rest of his days, since it was the one ghost hunt which nearly cost him his life and proved to be the start of a string of odd incidents and coincidences spanning many years.

THE HOUSE ON MONTPELIER ROAD

Born in Ealing in 1927, Andrew Green was introduced to the house at 16 Montpelier Road in September 1944 by his father, the wartime rehousing settlement officer for the borough, after plans to requisition the empty building to store furniture from bombed buildings had gone awry. In May 1944, Green's father inspected the house, which had been vacant for 10 years, and reported back to the Town Hall that, other than a smell of gas or sulphur in one room, it "was highly suitable and free from rising damp, wood rot and furniture beetle". The unpleasant smell was investigated without success, though it was only reported about once a month. The house otherwise appeared to be sound. Consequently, the recommendation was that it was highly suitable to be used for storage, although the room where the odour was most intense was to remain locked.

The first and only delivery of goods arrived in early May, but the team of five workmen involved all complained of a "cold and shivery" atmosphere once inside. Hastily packing up, they found that the tools they carried with them (for effecting any necessary repairs) were missing and all were alarmed by the sound of footsteps heard

from a first floor corridor. The team became so scared that they quit immediately. A few weeks later, when the furniture had to be removed to another store, all refused to return, declaring the house was 'haunted'. Despite offering cash inducements, Green's father had to recruit removal men from some distance away, the reputation of the house having spread. Suspecting there might be more to this, he then made enquiries with the Ealing police and was informed by a Sergeant Smith that the house had a history of suicides.

Having secured the building, Green senior was required to check it the following September, and duly invited Andrew along, asking his son if he would like to visit a haunted house? At the time Andrew was ignorant of psychic phenomena but intensely interested in science. Having heard his father's story he considered it a mystery to be solved and readily agree to come along, bringing his Kodak box camera.

Green wrote: "My feeling when I first saw the house was of some considerable excitement". Built in 1883, 16 Montepelier Road was a large, rambling Gothic-style building with a high tower on the northeast side at the back. Going inside, they were met by a musty smell, their footsteps echoing through the building "as if in a museum or an empty church". Equipped with a floor plan, Andrew went off to explore, working his way systematically from the cellar to the top of the building. Because the power was disconnected, he used matches and an old newspaper as a taper for lighting his way. Reaching the first floor with its locked room, he peered through the keyhole and was surprised to see it equipped as a laboratory, with a Bunsen burner, test tubes and jars. This seemed to explain the chemical smell, if not its monthly periodicity.

Ascending by a spiral staircase to the next level, he found a circular room with a trapdoor out to the roof, reached by a ladder. Climbing this, about four rungs from the top, Andrew felt a pair of hands lifting him from behind. Thinking it must be his father trying to assist him, he reached the bolt that secured the trapdoor. Successfully unbolting it, he turned to thank his father only to find no one there. Puzzled, he hauled himself up on to the roof and stood up.

"A slight breeze wafted over my face as I looked across towards London and noticed a couple of barrage balloons riding the clouds in the distance. As I stood admiring the view I slowly developed an urge to look over the parapet."

Peering down to the crazy paving in the overgrown garden some 60-70ft (18-21m) below, he felt no fear but an overwhelming urge to step off the tower.

The compulsion was so strong that he swung one leg over the parapet, accompanied by an internal voice in his mind, which seemed to command: "Walk over the parapet, it's only 12 inches to the lawn. You won't hurt yourself."

As he sat on the edge of the parapet, preparing to jump, the future of modern ghost hunting in Britain was in the balance. Fortunately, Green's father, brought up to the roof on a sudden impulse, pulled Andrew away



from the parapet by the scruff of the neck, saying: "We don't want any suicides in the family".

Green later wrote: "At that moment I was convinced I would not be hurt".³

Looking round, both noticed some odd symbols carved in the coping stone. His father frowned. "Black magic signs," he said. "I suppose that could account for it, but I can't see how."

Solemnly, Green senior led his son back to ground floor and asked for an explanation. Andrew later wondered: "Did 20 people really commit suicide, or were they affected in the same way I had been, impelled to casually 'walk over' the parapet?"⁴

THE GIRL IN THE WINDOW

Back on the ground, at about 2.30pm, Andrew strolled round to the back garden. He became conscious of an "atmosphere of malevolence – or was it sheer imagination?" He took a photograph and then they departed for home, delivering the camera to the chemists for development on the way. Reaching home, Green told his mother about his strange adventure. Her face conveyed expressions of concern and utter astonishment at his story.

It turned out his mother also knew the house at No 16. In 1934, she had been working as a temporary nurse with a local physician, Dr Pye, who was called out to a case of murder and suicide. A young nursemaid had thrown an infant from the roof of the tower of the house, and then jumped to her own death. Walking into the back garden, Mrs Green had been "somewhat upset" by seeing the grass on the lawn being mysteriously trodden down as if by an invisible person walking over it. The footprints approached a garden seat, which then moved and rocked as if someone were sitting in it. His mother had then gone to the spot where the deaths occurred. "The

bodies had gone but the stones were still wet from the water used to wash away the gory remains." When she later told Dr Pye, he made the cryptic remark "Nothing surprises me about that house," but refused to clarify it.

A week after hearing this story, Green returned to the chemist to collect his developed film. On being presented with the prints, he proudly told the chemist that they showed a haunted house.

"Oh yes," said the chemist, "and who is the girl in the window?"

He pointed at the top left hand corner of the picture, where there seemed to be a figure like a young girl in the window and a curtain halfway across. Puzzled, Green ordered an enlargement. The image was a double oddity – odd because there appeared to be not only a figure but a curtain – and in 1944, there were no curtains hanging.

Greatly intrigued, Green went to Ealing police and made further enquiries. He received the same information as his father: that the house had a history of suicides – some 20 in all. Each had jumped off the tower, the first being a 12-year-old girl named Anne Hinchfield in 1887.

Was this the girl in the window, Green wondered? So began the first of many checks on his photograph. No explanation could be found. A year later, with a member of

HE BECAME AWARE OF AN ATMOSPHERE OF MALEVOLENCE

the Royal Photographic Society, he tried to recreate the picture but without success.⁵

Further plans to investigate were interrupted by two years of National Service, but after demobilisation in 1949, Green appealed via the press with a short article in the London *Evening News*, mentioning his investigations at an "old house in Montpelier Road".⁶

This publicity drew a swift and sharp response from the new owner of No 16, who had converted it into apartments.⁷ Denying any knowledge of ghosts, he threatened legal action. Reluctantly, Green abandoned plans for another investigation.

A DRAMATIC INTERLUDE

Seeking another hobby Green turned to amateur dramatics, becoming involved with 'the Company of Thirteen', a local theatre group run by a BBC producer named Kenneth Yandell. At his first meeting Yandell announced they were trying to think of a new play to produce. Slightly tongue-in-cheek, Green proposed the play *The Poltergeist* by Gordon Harker and was surprised when everyone reacted favourably. Enthusiasm increased when Yandell then offered up his flat for rehearsals, telling everyone he believed it to be haunted. He and his wife had experienced strange footsteps, a peculiar sulphurous smell and their pet terrier "going berserk" once a month. Green and the rest of the company were intrigued at the idea of rehearsing within a real haunted house and Yandell then gave his address. It was in Ealing, just off Castlebar Road: 16 Montpelier Road!

Keeping his surprise to himself – as well as what he knew about the property – Green duly attended the rehearsal the following Monday.

Arriving at 16 Montpelier Road, he found it greatly changed from the gloomy house of eight years before. The Yandells occupied one of a number of comfortable furnished flats, with the former old chemical laboratory now transformed into the couple's pristine bathroom. During the evening, five of the seven group members claimed to hear rapid footsteps crossing the flat. Green heard nothing and was tempted to attribute it to autosuggestion, but one young lady, a Mrs Pyatt, seemed to fall into a trance, murmuring, "I only wanted to go into the garden, but the roof was higher than I thought", "My name was Anne", and "I didn't kill myself". These comments mystified everyone except for Green, who assumed that telepathy had occurred. After a few minutes, Mrs Pyatt regained full consciousness but was unable to explain her unusual comments. Discussion of the play resumed.

In fact, *The Poltergeist* was never produced, as the company was stricken with misfortune. The intended male lead was killed in car crash, there were severe financial problems and two active members moved away. However, Green took the opportunity to speak privately with other residents. Friends of the Yandells in another apartment reported "an old man's footsteps limping through the flat, right through the bedroom



TOP: The house at 16 Montpelier Road (then Mount Park Road), Ealing, was built in the 1880s by Robert Henry Wallace and known as 'Ella's Towers'.



ABOVE: Andrew Green's original 1944 photograph. BELOW: The figure at the window seen in an enlargement. BOTTOM: The 1945 attempt to recreate the earlier photo.

walls. It sounded as if he had a walking stick". Another couple, the Merianths, who occupied the tower flat, spoke of seeing their doorbell being depressed by an unseen finger. Incidents were reported to the owner but met with no response.

Two years later, Green met Yandell in Ealing Broadway and learned he had just been released from hospital after spending several days recovering from 'sulphur poisoning'. Yandell explained that following a weekend party where several guests had stayed over, makeshift beds had been provided on divans, chairs and the floor. Yandell had been allocated the bath; he didn't get much sleep, for at around two am his wife heard him "gasping and gurgling". Rushing in, she found him only half-conscious and fighting for breath. An ambulance was summoned and he was treated as an emergency at the King Edward Memorial Hospital. Later, Green interviewed the puzzled ward matron. Yandell had been nearly asphyxiated and would have died within 30 minutes if he had not been treated. She stated: "Nobody gets sulphur poisoning lying in a bath, but the odour of the fumes in his lungs strongly resembled stale gas or sulphur... so that was what was recorded." Yandell also told him he had destroyed their dog because of its recurrent fits.

In 1960 Andrew Green was a participant in a broadcast of an ITV advertising show called *Jim's Inn* hosted by Jimmy Hanley. Whilst waiting in the artists' lounge at the TV studio he overheard an exchange between a member of the team and scriptwriter Jack Edwardes, whom Green knew slightly. Edwardes was complaining about persistent trouble with the smell of gas at his home. "The gas men refuse to come any more. They have been six times



now to my flat to try to find the source of the smell in my bathroom and have given up."

Green later wrote: "I hardly bothered asking where he lived". As well as a persistent, monthly smell Edwardes had also heard noises – "someone walking through the flat sometimes."

RETURN TO MONTEPELIER ROAD

In 1971, whilst researching his book *Our Haunted Kingdom* (1973), Green returned to Montpelier Road and found the old Victorian building had been pulled down and a modern block of flats erected. He noted: "The new building lies several feet away to the south of the original and the actual site of the suicide tower is now empty air."⁸ However, some residents still spoke of strange banging noises, though not a brick of the old house remained.

Following the publication of *Our Haunted Kingdom*, a stream of people wrote or telephoned Green offering further information about No 16. Just days after the book came out, a reporter from the local newspaper went to make local enquiries and learned that 22 Montpelier Road, directly opposite, had a reputation for being haunted by "Shrieks, moans, screams and thumping noises". It transpired that No 22 had been the scene of a double homicide in February 1954 when Ronald Chesney had murdered his wife and mother-in-law Mrs Menzies. Chesney fled abroad and later shot himself in woods near Cologne.

One resident of No 16 in the 1950s wrote of a strange atmosphere in the house; another correspondent recalled its reputation as 'the suicide house' as early as 1912. Most extraordinary were three letters from a Mrs Laycock of Stockwell who in 1976 recalled

three months of service in the house as a 15-year-old maid between January and April 1922, when it was occupied by Mrs Nellie Theresa Demery.

Mrs Laycock's recollections, although fragmentary, were tantalising. She remembered a housekeeper called Mrs Thompson and a butler named Tanner who had been formerly employed at Kensington Palace and walked with a limp, his right leg having been damaged in an accident with coach horses. Mrs Laycock claimed that one day she had been clearing out boxes in a lumber-room and found a floorboard loose. Lifting it, she discovered a case containing four cutthroat razors with gold and tortoiseshell handles, wrapped in newspaper cuttings relating to the 'Jack the Ripper' murders of 1888 and the Duke of Clarence (who from the 1970s was one of the many improbable 'Jack the Ripper' suspects). Mrs Laycock claimed that the lid of the case was embellished with a royal crest and the words 'Kensington Palace'. She also mentioned a local story that the female owners of the house were witches. Her suspicions strengthened, she noticed that every Friday some kind of ceremony was held in the top room of the tower. The room was painted black, and none of the servants save for Mr Tanner was allowed to enter it. After the weekly ritual she had to collect the candlesticks from him for cleaning and would remove the stubs of black candles from them. A few months after leaving the property she heard Mr Tanner had committed suicide with an overdose of laudanum but that it was hushed up as an accidental death.

Intriguing as Mrs Laycock's claims were, it seems most likely they were a case of imagination influenced by well-publicised stories circulating in the 1970s linking Jack the Ripper with the Royal family. Andrew Green dismissed the account after the leading 'Royal Ripper' story was exposed as

a hoax in 1978.⁹

By now settled in Sussex, Green sporadically continued his enquiries into the history of Montpelier Road, with his last full account appearing in *Fate* magazine in 1985, revealing that the land had been purchased in March 1883 by a Robert Henry Wallace Dunlop who proceeded to build what he called 'Ellerslie Towers' on Mount Park Road.¹⁰ By 1894 a Mrs Lucy Wallace Dunlop was recorded in residence, and in 1903 the road had been re-named Montpelier Road and the house numbered as 16. Mrs Wallace Dunlop was resident until at least 1916.

Later records provide different names thereafter: a Frank Strange in 1917, an Edmond Gibbs in 1920-21, a Mrs Nellie Demery between 1922-27, a Garfield Carse (surgeon and physician) in 1929 and from 1930-1940 a Harry Barnard and Kathleen Barnard.¹¹

GHOSTLY MEMORIES

In the autumn of 1989 I began part-time teaching law at the Ealing College of Higher Education (now University of West London). I did not take any steps to visit Montpelier Road, as No 16 was long gone. Then, in 1995, I ended up representing the widow of the owner of the oldest established Indian restaurant in Ealing, the Taj Mahal (well, it *was* an original name in 1959). After the legal matter was successfully resolved, I was chatting with her about her memories of Ealing in the past and local history and ghosts, and I mentioned the haunted house at Montpelier Road. "I remembered hearing that story," she said at once, "The suicide house! It's the house where the ghostly girl appears at the bottom and



beckons to people to jump down to their deaths off the tower!'. She then told me how the story was well known in local folklore among the restaurant's customers and the local Asian community. I thought it remarkable that the story could have penetrated so far, obviously growing in the telling.

I decided to begin some research myself at Ealing library and archives. However, although names could be found associated with the property there were no records to be found of any suicides. In particular, nothing could be found of the murder-suicide case

of 1934 in the local press of the time. Such an incident must have been reported, I thought – or had Mrs Green simply been confused? However, it seemed implausible that such a shocking crime would have been hushed up, if it happened at all.

Today I would not be so sure. For instance, in the course of re-examining a historic poltergeist case in London, I have discovered a medical cover-up in the 1930s involving falsifying birth registration details and bribery to conceal the true parentage of a baby boy – a deceit that those involved in continued for many years. More widely, from investigations into historic abuse allegations, the Bloody Sunday inquiry in Northern Ireland and challenges to coroner's inquiries most recently with the Hillsborough disaster 'official versions' can be manipulated and corrupted. But perhaps Mrs Green was simply mistaken; there might not have been a murder, or perhaps it was a case of a botched abortion or a stillbirth, followed by suicide. Maybe there had been no deaths at all.

In September 1996 I met Andrew Green, by then 69 years old, on a weekend course about ghosts and hauntings being held at Pyke House, at Battle in Sussex, where he told the story of his experiences some half a century earlier. Discussing the evidence, he said that his own extensive enquiries had similarly drawn a blank, providing a tantalising collection of names connected to 16 Montpelier Road, but no evidence of multiple suicides. With a few exceptions, police records, including those at Scotland Yard, were typically dumped after a few years¹² and the widespread censorship of the time might have erased evidence and corroboration in numerous ways; as Jan Bondeson has shown, public memory of London 'murder houses' is relatively short. Green had written in his own *Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide*: "This mixture of scraps of genuine information and incorrect dates is fairly commonly encountered, and a pitfall to watch for... Don't be deceived, either, into assuming that all official information need never be questioned." Green had not been able to penetrate any further into what went on in the house at the time of the Wallace Dunlop family, and concluded that the many mysteries of 16 Montpelier Road would never be solved.

Andrew Green died in May 2004, three months after a special lecture and award



ABOVE: No 22 Montpelier Road, directly opposite the 'Suicide House', also gained a reputation for being haunted. In February 1954, when this photograph was taken, it was the scene of a double murder.

ceremony with the Ghost Club to mark his 60 years in paranormal research. At the lecture he recalled that whilst many people had said they could make out a figure like a girl in the window in his photo, others proclaimed they could see a child, 'a man in a hat' or a dog. Since 1971, he told us, "the total population of that window now stands at 27".¹³

Between 2010 and 2012 I took custody of Green's records and archives and began sorting them. He published three versions of the Montpelier House story between 1973 and 1985 and also left two manuscript versions for books that were never published.¹⁴ With a few minor discrepancies, (for instance, he refers to visiting the house in June rather than September in one), the accounts tallied in all significant details.

Shortly after reading his last account, I enjoyed a synchronicity of my own. I had been asked to advise on a will and settlement concerning a recently deceased lady in London. The name of her common law partner was... Ian Wallace Dunlop. Startled, I at once made the mental connection with the family name published by Green in 1985, and I wasted no time in going to see Mr Wallace Dunlop, then a gentleman in his early 80s, living in a flat in West London surrounded by antiques.

I was right to go immediately, for I found him terminally ill with cancer. Despite chemotherapy he was cheerful and displayed an impish sense of humour. But on the subject of Montpelier Road he grew more sombre. He explained that the Wallace Dunlops had been a family who had come down in the world; the antiques and portraits were relics from their finer days, salvaged from Montpelier Road, and they now surrounded him in the flat. There was a painting of his grandfather, the Robert Wallace Dunlop who had built the house and had been a judge in colonial India. Although the Wallace Dunlops had lost the property before he was born, Ian recollected hearing, in family stories, of the death of a female servant employed in the house in the late 19th century – "possibly suicide" – but knew no details. He did not recognise the name Anne Hinchfield and he was emphatic that neither the Wallace Dunlops nor their servants had made a habit of killing themselves. They had left the house because of their waning fortunes, not because of tragedies, ghosts or scandals. Although his grandfather was "an awful snob" (he had actually bought a house near Balmoral so he could claim to be "close to royalty"), Ian knew



ABOVE: The site where 16 Montpelier Road once stood as it appears today. By 1971, when Andrew Green returned, the 'Suicide House' had been replaced by Elgin Court, a modern block of flats.

ETIENNE GUILFAN

of no connections with Kensington Palace and found talk of black magic "ridiculous". Regarding the later stories from 1930-1960 he could add nothing.¹⁵

So this moved the matter no further forward, other than confirming that rumours of suicide could be traced to the 19th century.

CONCLUSIONS

What is the solution to the Montpelier Road 'Suicide House' mystery? Looking at the totality of accounts collected over the years, it seems possible there was a genuine low-level haunting, consisting of unexplained noises and possibly an inexplicable smell (though the regularity of this makes it dubious). Possibly there was also some minor poltergeist-like activity – and from this the accounts seem to have grown in local retellings into a ghostly girl provoking or causing suicides among residents of the house. But there is no evidence, beyond hearsay, of any multiple suicides, nor any details of the 'Anne Hinchfield' or other individuals who reputedly killed themselves. These stories were in circulation before the double murders at No 22 in 1954, but beyond these unverified claims, the only certain example of anybody trying to kill themselves by leaping from the tower comes from the testimony of Andrew Green himself. What triggered this incident is impossible to determine; Andrew was willing to entertain a range of possibilities, but not that he had become possessed by a spirit. He did not believe in ghosts as conscious entities, rather that they were recordings arising somewhere on the electromagnetic spectrum;

they could be photographed on occasion but their power to influence the living was limited. He thought a residual mental image might account for the figure in his photograph, if that is what it was, but remained open to entirely mundane explanations.

But even with his rejection of spirits, he could not resist wondering just how this had flowed from his first ever attempt at ghost hunting. Privately he admitted "being 'haunted' by the house and its history for many years, and after so many strange coincidences".¹⁶

Ultimately, we are now never likely to learn the truth about what really did or not happen at 16 Montpelier Road. But the search for the truth about the ghostly girl and the 'House of Suicides' luminously demonstrates the challenges that ghost hunting can throw up for those bold enough to embark upon it as an activity. **FT**

A new edition of Andrew Green's *Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide* edited by Alan Murdie will be available from Arima Publishing later this month, priced £11.50, ISBN: 9781845496876.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



ALAN MURDIE is a lawyer and writer with a longstanding interest in forteen phenomena. A former president of the Ghost Club, he compiles FT's monthly Ghostwatch column as well as being a regular feature writer.

NOTES

1 Andrew Green, *Ghost Hunting: A Practical Guide*, Garnstone Press, 1973.

2 CD Broad, *The Mind and Its Place in Nature*, 1937. Broad wrote: "The average spirit is morally no worse than the average fellow of Trinity, though there is a marked difference in the intelligence of the two".

3 Andrew Green, *Our Haunted Kingdom*, Wolfe Publications, 1973, p201.

4 Andrew Green, accounts in *Our Haunted Kingdom* (1973), *Prediction* June 1975 Vol 41 No 6 pp16-19, 56-57, and a typed account dated 26 January 1977 (Green archive).

5 It is not a double exposure or a fault on the film. Report from Dr Barrie Colvin of the Spontaneous Cases Committee of the Society for Psychical Research in 2014, 25 May 2016.

6 'Girl Ghost Gave Him A Surprise', *Evening News* 15 July 1949.

7 Mr Gerald Reed of Corfton Road, Ealing.

8 Andrew Green, 'The House of Suicides', *Fate*, Aug 1985, issue 425.

9 See 'Jack the Ripper 'solution' was a hoax, man confesses' by David May in *Sunday Times* 18 June 1978.

10 Green, *Fate* 425.

11 *Kelly's Directories* 1889-1911; *Kelly's Directories* 1912-27; *Kelly's Directories* 1928-1940. Some years are missing, 1916 and 1941-48, and for some years no one is listed.

12 The records of the Whitechapel 'Jack the Ripper' murders in 1888 came close to being dumped in the early 1960s.

13 Andrew Green, lecture, Pyke House, Battle,

Sussex, 7 Feb 2004.

14 *Prediction*, June 1975, Vol 41, No 6, pp16-19, 56-57.

15 Interview with Ian Wallace Dunlop, 21 Sept 2010.

16 Andrew Green, unpublished account dated 26 Jan 1977 and lecture 7 Feb 2004.

THE HAUNTED HEARTH

In an extract from his new book *The Hidden Folk: Are Fairies and Poltergeists Just the Same Thing?* **SD TUCKER** examines the ever-burning issue of spook-haunted fireplaces, ovens and chimneys.

No doubt British Gas engineers get some strange call-outs; few, though, can ever have been asked to deal with a ghost blocking a person's chimney. This, however, seems to have been the problem afflicting one unnamed remote Breton farmhouse in 1913. A plague of perplexing poltergeisty was afoot, and word had got out the house was bewitched. A certain Jean Mettois and his friend – hardy lads who decided to investigate – were greeted by the woman of the house with the query: “Are you good sorcerers?” They replied that they *might* just have enough magical powers to dispel any evil forces bothering her, if she could spin them a good enough yarn in return – which she promptly did.

“Ah, Monsieur,” she explained, “our horses and beasts die, our oats melt away, our corn is eaten. If you slept on the farm for a single night, you might die of fright. Every night there is an uproar which does not give us a minute's sleep.

“Look there,” she said, pointing to the fireplace, “stones fall one by one with a terrible clatter. It sounds as if thunder had broken in the chimney. About midnight we see white forms trailing burdens on the ground, the locked doors open of themselves, the horses get loose and run wildly about the yard, the cows low with fright. It is enough to drive one mad!” She herself was not mad, however; Mettois stayed the night and experienced some of the phenomena for himself, being awoken by what he called “furious blows, as if somebody armed with a battering-ram were trying to force the door [or] ... break the chimney.” Mettois got a ladder, climbed onto the roof and looked down the flue. It was empty – yet still the blows shook the fireplace below. The chimney, it appeared, was haunted.

SOME OVENS DO 'AVE 'EM!

There is a surprisingly persistent tradition of chimneys, hearths and ovens having their attendant spirits, whether identified as fairy-folk or unquiet ghosts like the Breton poltergeist. Very often, such spooks were given the names of brownies and boggarts (see panel), and were said to be attached to specific families, almost as ancestral or tutelary spirits; but where, ultimately, did the belief in such fire-dwelling family phantoms come from? One suggestion might be that they have their origins in the Classical world, in the old Roman concept of household spirits known as *lares* and *penates*.

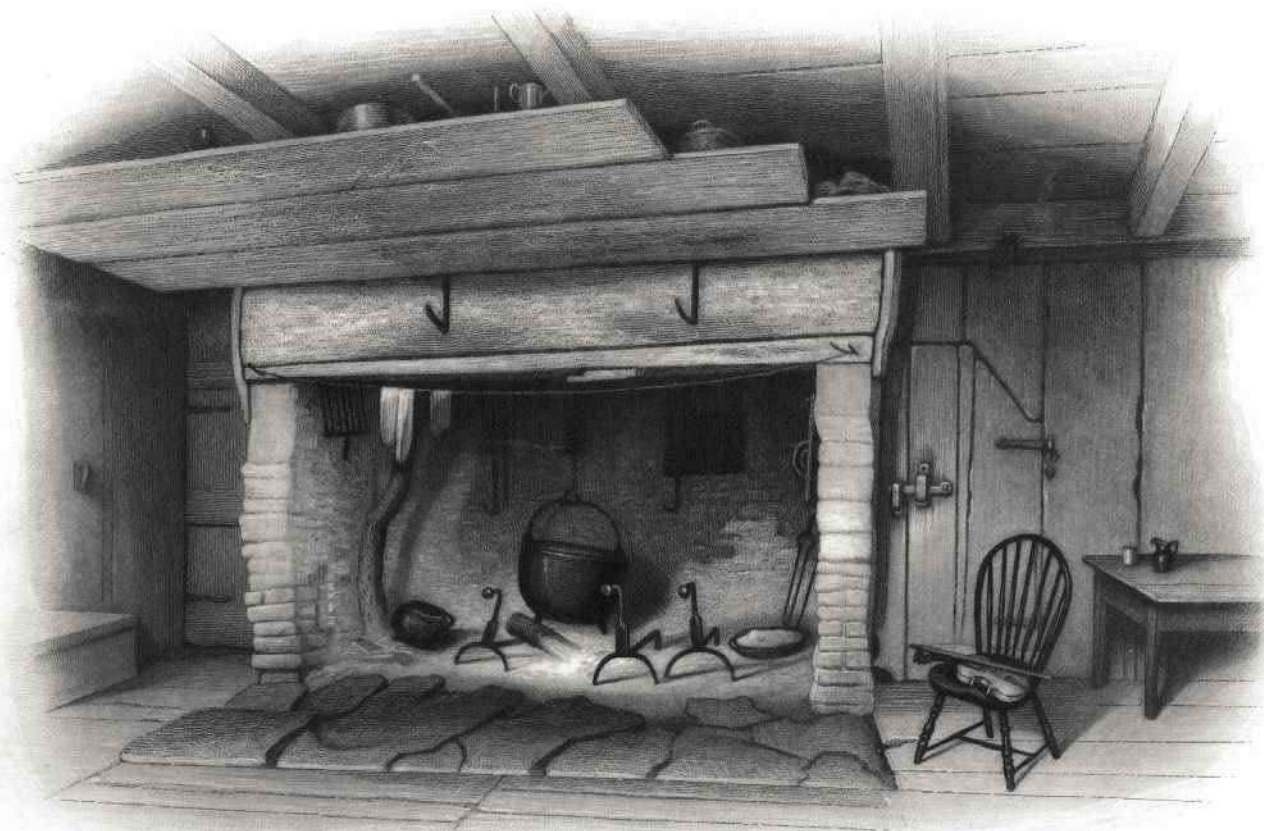
The exact nature and function of the *lares*

is slightly uncertain, but they were basically guardian deities of some kind. There were several different sub-species, the most relevant being the *lares familiares* and *lares domestici*, the household and family versions, which also merged somehow with the *penates*, a closely-related class of minor deity whose name means ‘gods of the storehouse’, or *penum*, the innermost part of a Roman house where supplies of food, wine and oil were kept. It was said that looking after your *lar* would bring good fortune but that neglecting it was unwise, a parallel notion to the later European idea that a helpful brownie would turn into a malevolent boggart when riled. According to some ancient



ABOVE: A household lararium in Pompeii, complete with a handy niche to hold figurines of deities.

CLASU ABLEITER / CREATIVE COMMONS



Painted by W.H. Willcox.

THE HEARTH STONE

Engraved by John Sartain.

ARCHIVE PHOTOS / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: 'The Hearth Stone' in an engraving by John Sartain from the painting by Willcox, London, circa 1791-1852. **BELOW:** An illustration of Wag-at-the-Wa' sitting in the crook of a hook used for hanging pots or kettles in the hearth.

commentators, such negligence could lead to a *lar* becoming a *larva* or *lemur*, malicious and formless spirits which would bother people in their beds at night, and otherwise cause a nuisance. Others, however, suggested that a person who neglected the state of their own soul in life would be punished for their sins by being turned into a *larva* after death; whereas, if they cultivated and honoured it properly, they would become a helpful and benign *lar*.

These domestic *lares* were meant to live inside hearths and fireplaces; according to the fairy-folklorist Katharine Briggs, they were thought of as being the spirits of ancient hearth-sacrifices, accounting for their choice of abode. In the view of the French demonologist Pierre Le Loyer, writing in 1586, however, the reason for their occupancy of fireplaces was probably that in early Rome the dead bodies of family-members used to be buried beneath the hearths of the very same houses in which their descendants continued to live. This is essentially guesswork, though.

OVEN-READY BROWNIES

In centuries past, the fire (or oven) was the very centre of a household, essential to life. As such, if there were any household spirits you wanted to propitiate, it was definitely the hearthside ones. One of the most common domestic locations in which people imagined a 'fairy-house' could be found was beneath their fireplace, with the hearthstone being the trapdoor-entrance. Katharine Briggs tells of a house in Airlie, Scotland, with a crack

SEVERAL CAKES LEFT BAKING BY THE FIRE MYSTERIOUSLY DISAPPEARED

in the hearthstone. Locally, it was said to have been haunted by fairies because several cakes left baking by the fire had mysteriously disappeared. Eventually, the house was demolished, and a solution to the 'mystery' found; the cakes had been falling down a crack in the hearthstone, several mouldy ones being discovered beneath it. In Briggs's opinion, though, the truth was likely to have been different; people had been purposely slipping the baked treats down the crack as offerings for the household brownies.

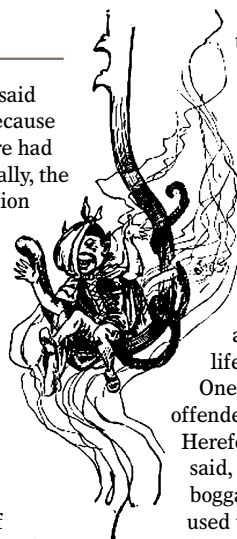
The pot-hook which hung over open fireplaces before the dawn of 20th-century domestic comforts was also a favoured fairy-spot. In Scottish folklore there was a specific fairy-breed known as Wag-at-the-Wa', who just loved to sit on the pot-hook whenever it was empty. If you were foolish enough to idly swing or spin this item around, then you were asking to be paid a visit from the creature, who had many of the classic attributes of a brownie; he disliked lazy servants, and could be

heard laughing from thin air. He wasn't hairy like most brownies, though. Instead, Wag-at-the-Wa' was an ugly old man with blue breeches, grey cape, nightcap and red coat, and a bandage tied around his face due to persistent toothache. Down south in Herefordshire, however, it was common-or-

garden brownies that were meant to sit on the pot-hook all day, not Wag-at-the-Wa'. Here, the crook in the hook, useful for hanging kettles on, was termed the 'brownie-sway'.

If there was no crook, then this was considered bad form, an upside-down horseshoe being put on the hook instead so that brownie still had his seat. This was a wise precaution to take because, if brownie took offence at your neglect, he could make your life unpleasant.

One such example of a mortally offended domestic fairy comes from Herefordshire, a county where, it was said, the household brownies and boggarts (just like Wag-at-the-Wa') used to sit on the 'sway' – the iron bar above the hearth where pots and kettles hung. Accordingly, whenever the hobgoblin was deemed to have been offended, small offerings of food were left out by the fireplace to appease him. According to the Herefordshire folklorist EM Leather, writing in 1912: "Brownie sometimes took offence at what he considered slights to himself, and his favourite and chief form of revenge was to hide the household keys; there was only





LEFT: The famous 1934 case of the ‘Spook of Saragossa’ or ‘Duende de Zaragoza’. Police inspect the flue of the cooker from which voices were said to issue. **ABOVE:** The only known photograph of 16-year-old Maria Pascuela, the servant girl at the centre of the events. **BELOW:** A Russian domovoi who acts as a household guardian, manifesting as a small hairy creature, an old bearded man or even a cat or dog.

one way in which they could be brought back. The members of the household sat in a circle round the hearth, after placing a little cake upon the hob, as a peace-offering. The party sat in absolute silence with closed eyes, when the keys would be flung violently at the wall at the back of the sitters.”

LITTLE VOICE

Gradually, ovens grew separated from fireplaces, becoming appliances in their own right – but still the spooks kept on haunting them. The most notable case was that of the ‘Saragossa Spook’ (or ‘*La Duende de Zaragoza*’ – ‘the Zaragoza Fairy’ – as it was called in Spanish), which caused a media frenzy back in November 1934. The spirit manifested itself in a flat in the Spanish city of Zaragoza, occupied by the Palazon family and their 16-year-old servant-girl, Maria Pascuela. The polt had only the one trick up its sleeve: it liked to talk to people down the chimney-flue of an “economical cooker” in the kitchen. This voice was intelligent, could answer questions, addressed persons by name and demonstrated a certain sense of humour. When an architect and workmen were called in to investigate, they searched the apartment building from roof to cellar, but could find no practical jokers. Finally, the architect ordered his men to measure the flue, presumably thinking that some recording-device was hidden away in there. “You need not trouble, the diameter is just 6 inches”, the spook informed them politely from within the empty chimney-pipe. They measured it anyway ... and found that the *duende* was exactly right.

The trouble began one morning when Maria the maid was lighting a fire in the kitchen, intending to cook breakfast. As she did so, the voice came out of the cooker-chimney, greeting her “effusively”. She was predictably startled and her mistress came

FROM THIS POINT, THE OVEN WOULDN'T SHUT UP AND TALKED INCESSANTLY



in to see what the matter was, only for the voice to address her too. From this point onwards, the oven just wouldn’t shut up. Some days it talked “almost incessantly”. The police were called, but could do nothing. How do you arrest a ghost – or a cooker? Eventually, the voice seems simply to have gone away; 20 people were present during its final appearance, including policemen, doctors and a local magistrate. They all heard the spook speak. Their explanation

was that young Maria was “an unconscious ventriloquist” and that the voice was no ghost, but “a psychic phenomenon produced only in certain circumstances.” It seems they felt the maid was creating a voice inside her head and then externalising it inside the oven-flue somehow, using some ill-defined psychic/ventriloquistic powers.

I don’t think that the Spanish officials had the slightest idea of what the Saragossa Spook really was; but they had to say it was *something*, so plucked an appropriate-sounding explanation from the air of the society around them. What witnesses choose to call the ghosts in their ovens is largely a matter of what they feel is culturally sanctioned. For example, one old case involved a house in Ampfersbach, in what is now French Alsace, which was supposedly haunted by the Devil. Satan revealed himself there, it would appear, largely by producing poltergeist-type noises; unseen chains would rattle, heavy but invisible objects pound against the door, and the pots and pans in the kitchen clang and jangle throughout the night. These noises returned every evening until, surprisingly, the householder carried out a rather bizarre form of exorcism – he had a bread-oven installed! Clearly this particular spook was not Satan at all, but a homeless household familiar in need of appropriate shelter.

Depending on their geographical location, these things have different names, such as the Russian *domovoi* – a small, hairy little man who acts as a household guardian; the term literally means ‘he of the house’. Like many fairies, he is a shape-shifter, sometimes being seen in hairy form, but at other times as a little old man with a beard, as a cat or dog, or as the double of the master of the household. Usually, though, he is invisible. Traditionally, each home was meant to have its own guardian *domovoi*, who would help out by performing chores and work in the fields. In return for guaranteeing family prosperity, milk and biscuits would be left

YOU JUST CAN'T GET THE STAFF...

Were brownie legends just a way of managing the rural workforce and scaring sluttish servants?



ABOVE LEFT: A meeting with the Little People in James Bowker's 1878 book *Goblin Tales of Lancashire*, which told the story of Daniel Burton and Puck.
ABOVE RIGHT: An exhausted Puck, or Lob-Lie-by-the-Fire, lies in front of the hearth with an empty cream-bowl visible by his right hand.

There are many different types of fairy from the annals of folklore but two specific subcategories relevant to this article are brownies and boggarts. The meanings of these terms do differ, but basically they were conceived of as being generally invisible fairies that lived and worked inside houses, farms and stables. Brownies are the best known, being depicted as performing unseen labour upon a farm or within a household overnight in return for simple offerings of food. For example, during the 19th century a man named Daniel Burton owned a farm in Levenshulme, where he was supposed to have had a friendly brownie named Puck. According to one account: "During the night everything was cleaned up, and all was in apple-pie order when... [the servants] came into the kitchen at daybreak; the milk churned, the cows foddered, the necessary utensils filled with water from the well, the horses ready harnessed for their day's work at the plough, and even a week's threshing done and the barn left as tidy as though it had just been emptied and swept."

The most likely explanation for such tales is that jealous farmers used them to 'explain' their rivals' success. Daniel Burton's farm was apparently "a model one in its way" with "the old man raising finer crops than any other farmer in the district", according to James Bowker, who recorded the story in his 1878 book *Goblin Tales of Lancashire*. Maybe this was just luck – Burton's farm may have had good soil and diligent workers. It seems that other local landowners could not accept this, though, and, in Bowker's words, "finding a reproach to their own idleness not only in the old man's success but also in the careful, industrious habits of his everyday life, [they] were not slow to insinuate that there was something more than farming at the bottom of it." Another idea popular locally was not that Burton had a brownie but, rather, that he had sold his soul to Satan to guarantee a

good income from his fields.

Such notions of helpful household familiars were once very well-known, the belief being alluded to in pre-modern English literature such as Milton's poem *L'Allegro*, wherein a country-lad:

*Tells how the drudging goblin sweat
To earn his cream-bowl duly set,
When in one night, ere glimpse of morn,
His shadowy flail hath threshed the corn
That ten day-labourers could not end,
Then lays him down the lubber fiend,
And stretched out all the chimney's length,
Basks at the fire his hairy strength;
And crop-full out of door he flings,
Ere the first cock his matin rings.*

Here, the 'lubber fiend' (or 'benevolent goblin') has been left offerings of food to induce him to perform his household duties. An alternative name for Milton's helpful goblin was 'Lob-Lie-by-the-Fire'; he was supposed to be a hairy spirit with a long tail, who would work through the early hours of the night upon his adopted farm before lying down and resting in front of the hearth with his bowl of cream. Once he is 'crop-full' of this particular food, Milton tells us, Lob then 'flings' or rushes out of the door before cockcrow sounds his doom amidst the morning light. Had these offerings not been left, however, Lob would either not have done the work, or started to bother everyone with poltergeist pranks in the guise of a boggart, which (sometimes, at least – I am simplifying here) was thought of as being a brownie gone bad – imagine an angry *domovoi*, throwing a hissy-fit. Basically, then, mistreat a kind, chimney-dwelling family-helping fairy and it would turn into an evil, family-haunting poltergeist, was how the fable went.

The standard interpretation of such legends, of course, is that they were used to both encourage and strike fear into a farm

or household's workers; as one informant put it in 1734, the domestic fairies would "do good to the industrious people, but they pinch the sluts". Misbehaving or lazy servants – to be 'sluttish' used to mean to be untidy and slatternly – would be punished, whereas good workers might get some fairy-money as a reward for their virtue. Telling your staff these tales would be a good way to keep them in line; such a pleasant fiction was a much more romantic solution than employee-employer contracts, at any rate (some may wish we still used this method). As Bishop Corbet put it in his (premature) 17th-century lament for the passing of the fairy-faith, *A Proper New Ballad, Entitled the Fairies' Farewell*:

*Farewell, rewards and fairies,
Good housewives now may say,
For now foul sluts in dairies
Do fare as well as they;
And though they sweep their hearths no less
Than maids were wont to do,
Yet who of late for cleanliness
Finds sixpence in her shoe?*

Who indeed? Next to no one these days, sadly – and yet...

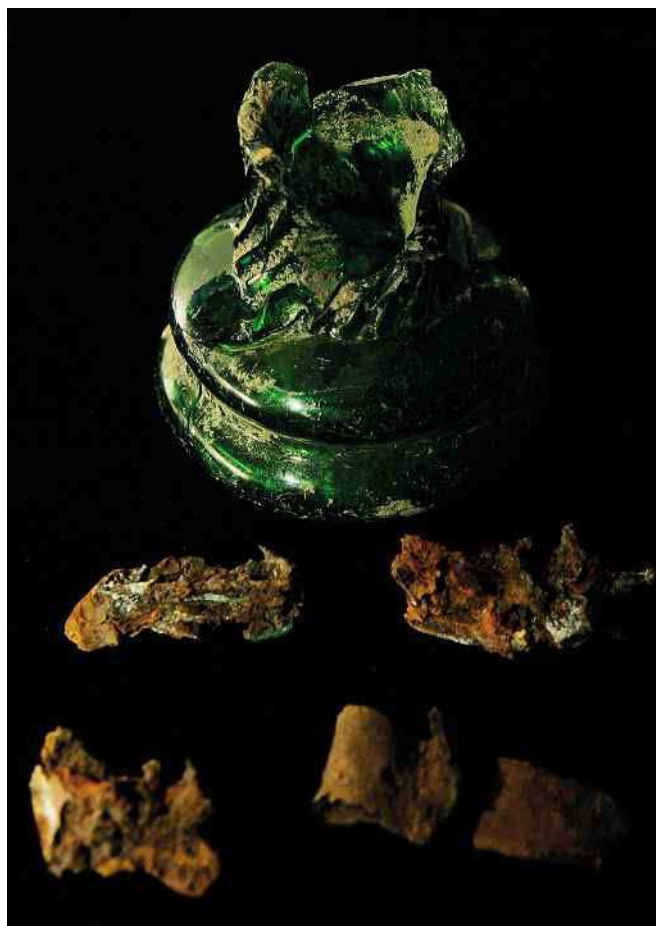
In 2006, *FT* carried a letter from a lady (certainly no slut) named Jennifer McGhee, of Greenock, Scotland. Whilst tidying her bathroom one day, Jennifer was kneeling on the toilet-seat to dust the shelves above. When she had finished, she was surprised to find a crisp £20 note on top of the toilet, where there had been no note before, lying "perfectly flat as if it had just come out of a cash machine". She texted her boyfriend, and he suggested that Jennifer say thank you for this, so she did – and at that very moment there came a sudden polt-like knock on her bedroom door, even though she had thought she was alone in the flat (see **FT206:75**). At last, the brownies were back!

out for him in the kitchen overnight. Predictably, they were meant to live in or beneath stoves and ovens (or at the threshold of the house, under the doorstep). If you wanted to attract one, the best thing to do was to place some bread in front of the oven as temptation. However, a *domovoi* who was displeased with his 'owners' (due to their neglect of either it or the housework) could turn poltergeist and play all the usual nasty tricks; smash crockery, bang pots and walls, moan and groan, leave muddy footprints, move and rattle small objects and torment horses in stables. Because of these characteristics, an alternative and pejorative Russian word, *barabashka*, can be used to describe a *domovoi* gone bad – it means 'rattler'.

WITCH'S KITCHEN

An unexpected link between witchcraft and polt-infested chimneys, meanwhile, can be found in a 1612 haunting from the Bourgogne in France. Here, in the house of a Huguenot minister named François Perrault, all kinds of spooky wonders occurred – the explanation, supposedly, being that the clergyman had been cursed by a witch. Perrault only got his new house at the expense of its previous female occupant, who had been dispossessed of the property by court order. Seeing as Perrault had benefited from this decision, the woman blamed him for her misfortune and, one day, she was discovered by Perrault hiding inside his chimney breast, making ritual curses and invoking Satan. Naturally, Perrault reported this, and the woman was ordered to appear before local magistrates and bound over to end her persecutions on 22 December – the very day that the poltergeist activity in the home ceased. Significantly, when the ghost did finally depart, it hung two little bells upon a nail in the chimney and was heard from no more.

The hearth was once thought one of the main centres of domestic magic; just like a door or window, it represented an opening through which malign influences or evil spirits could potentially pass. Many magical items like 'witch-bottles' (bottles filled with pins, rags, bones, urine and other such supposedly magical substances), mummified cats, and empty pots intended to catch spirits are often found buried beneath hearthstones or stuffed up chimneys when old houses are demolished. These items had an apotropaic function – they were meant to ward off evil (For witch bottles see: **FT142:26, 144:51, 255:16**. For mummified cats as guardians see: **FT52:6-7, 75:13, 77:7, 286:8, 287:10**). If some cursed item was buried beneath the hearth instead, however, or malign spells muttered within a chimneybreast, then it would be reasonable to assume that this would have had an opposite effect. As well as being used to toast crumpets and boil kettles, then,



LEFT: This 19th century glass witch-bottle and contents was found in Navenby, Lincolnshire during building work.

home some coal. Soon, it was exploding inside his fireplace and storage-buckets, without the stuff being lit. Suspicious, Mr Frost called the police – and a constable not only witnessed coal mysteriously detonating but also hopping out of fire-grates and sauntering along floors. An Inspector made his way to Hornsey and picked up a piece of coal to examine more closely. As he did so, it split into three separate pieces within his hands before simply vanishing. Things got worse. Various fireside items, like buckets and irons, began to dance around, and objects repeatedly fell to the floor without breaking. Burning coals not only jumped from grates but passed through solid walls into other rooms and showered to the ground out of thin air. Interestingly, a pot hanging over the fire took to swinging about of its own accord – perhaps it was a 'brownie-sway'?

What exactly this whole subject signifies is a real puzzle, however. Do modern polts sometimes reputedly live inside hearths,

household fireplaces were once thought of as potentially dangerous spiritual battlefields.

There is even an old tradition that chimneys could be appropriate places for priests and cunning men to 'lay' troublesome ghosts ('laying' being a kind of temporary exorcism, wherein a spirit is 'conjured' to live within some inaccessible location for a certain period of time, often 100 years). Bagley House in Dorset, for instance, was supposed to have been haunted during the 1880s by a male phantom that caused various auditory phenomena. Often, people would hear doors opening and closing or the sound of crockery being tossed about, only for closer inspection to reveal that none of these events had actually occurred at all. As is the usual way, an explanatory narrative was invented, and it was said the noises emanated from the ghost of a former owner of the house who had drowned on a hunting trip many years before. Having caused much bother to the house's inhabitants following his demise, it was said that a group of clergymen had pooled their powers to lay the unquiet Squire inside one of the house's chimneys for a set number of years – a term of imprisonment which had finally expired by the 1880s.

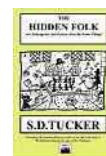
UNCLEAN FUEL, UNCLEAN SPIRITS

Charles Fort had an example of a haunted hearth. In *Wild Talents*, he tells of uncanny events within the household of a Mr JS Frost of the north London district of Hornsey. Around 1 January 1921, Mr Frost brought

ovens and chimneys because they really are, literally, the hidden folk of old? Or are such accounts merely unconscious echoes of old fairy-lore which have found their way, unexpectedly, into that type of modern folk-tale we now call the 'ghost story'? Or, alternatively, is it the case that poltergeists are real but inherently ideoplastic in nature, changing form to suit the expectations of their victims, picking up on their childhood knowledge of old fairy-stories whenever they choose to manifest themselves?

Do any *FT* readers have haunted ovens or chimneys of their own, I wonder? **FT**

(For an account of an oven apparently being haunted by an incontinent ghost-badger, see *FT*95:51)



Adapted from *The Hidden Folk: Are Poltergeists and Fairies Just the Same Thing?* by SD Tucker. The book is available from CFZ Press (ISBN: 9781909488403) All references can be found within.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



SD TUCKER is an FT regular whose books include *The Hidden Folk*, *Forgotten Science* and *Great British Eccentrics*. His own oven remains largely ornamental in purpose.

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THE GHOSTS OF THE OSTRICH INN

DR TOM LICENCE goes in search of the grisly story behind a haunted inn, and asks whether or not such imagined histories both keep ghost stories alive and shape our interpretations of strange phenomena...



GREG BALFOUR EVANS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: The Ostrich Inn, Colnbrook, Berkshire, built around 1500, possibly on the site of an earlier inn on this important route from Slough to London.

About the year 1598, the writer Thomas Deloney published a novel called *Thomas of Reading*, in which the eponymous hero, Thomas Cole, is murdered by the innkeeper Jarman and his wife while staying at The Crane in Colnbrook. The couple, whenever they spied a rich guest, would set the 'fat pig' in a special chamber above the kitchen, where the bed was sewn to the sides of the bedstead, which was nailed to a trapdoor in the floor. By

THE OCCUPANT OF THE BED WOULD BE TIPPED INTO A BOILING CAULDRON AND KILLED

pulling out two iron pins below, it would be let down on its hinges at dead of night, tipping the occupant into a boiling cauldron beneath and killing him instantly. In Cole's case, however, the couple make a mistake, leaving the stable door open. Cole's horse bolts and is discovered. Jarman flees, and his wife confesses to 60 murders. The innkeeper is then apprehended in Windsor forest, and both are hanged. Henry I (reigned 1100-35), in whose reign the novel is set, is so saddened at hearing of

Cole's death that he grieves for seven days, orders that the The Crane be burnt to the ground, and commands that the spot never be built on again. The novelist then hints that there might be some truth behind the story, remarking that the river where Cole's body was found subsequently received his name, and the town came to be known as 'Colebrooke' (i.e. Colnbrook, near Slough in Berkshire).

Deloney's fiction catered for popular Elizabethan tastes, which favoured high romance set against a backdrop of English history. A writer of ballads and broadsheets for the public, he borrowed from the chronicles, peddling tales of kings, queens and romantic figures such as Lady Godiva, Wat Tyler and Jack Straw. Deloney also drew on contemporary scandals and worked them into an historical setting. His ballad 'The Lamentation of Mr Page's wife', concerning a woman sentenced to die for the murder of her husband, was based upon an actual incident from the 1590s. His broadside from 1586 covering the contemporary Babington conspiracy gives an account of the trials and execution of the culprits at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Deloney could not fit the names of the alleged traitors into the ballad proper, so he tacked them on at the end.¹

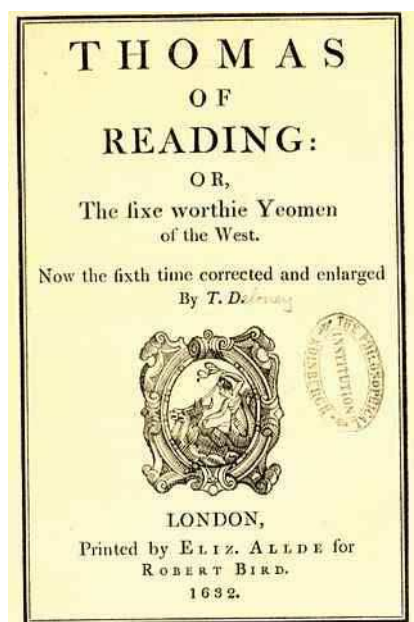
In *Thomas of Reading* it is only at the end that we learn that the innkeeper's name was 'Jarman'. If Deloney had invented the story one might expect the name to appear nearer the beginning. Its appearance, instead, as an afterthought, could suggest that he was

attempting to include detail from a known story without diverting attention from Cole in the moving scene that precedes his murder. During Cole's last hours, Deloney refers to no other character by name except Thomas Dove, to whom Cole wants to bequeath money. The innkeeper's name is revealed after he has fled and appears twice in the next two sentences. Deloney moved from ballads onto more extended and creative prose works in the last years of his life, but his long experience of using

contemporary scandals to create exciting stories may account for the murders in *Thomas of Reading*. Perhaps the tale of Jarman's murders in Colnbrook borrowed from a notorious case, which Deloney adapted for an historical setting, omitting the killer's name until the end so as to suspend the make-believe for as long as possible before cleverly linking it to reality. It may be that Deloney had spent too long as a 'journalist' to hide a true story completely.

THE OSTRICH INN

The town of Colnbrook stands on four channels of the river Colne, which formed a county boundary between Buckinghamshire and Middlesex, emerging as a convenient stopover point on the main Slough-Windsor route to London. The Ostrich Inn, which fronts the road, was built c.1500 and included the two adjoining shops beyond what is the present dining area, although the staircase and much of the panelling are 17th-century. Local tradition says that The Ostrich occupies the site of an earlier inn (hospitium) granted by Milo Crispin to the abbey of Abingdon c.1106. The hospitium is, however, more likely to have been associated with the 'Spital Bridge' mentioned in 1443 (such hosteleries often being located at bridges), or 'le Spital House', referred to in 1605 and 1635, a name surviving in the present 'Spital Farm'. Colnbrook of course had numerous inns, including The Catherine Wheel, The Talbot, The Pelican, The Angel and The George, and was clearly an important resting point.



ABOVE: Thomas Deloney's 1598 novel *Thomas of Reading*. ABOVE: Sarah Morgan, current manager of The Ostrich, reports strange phenomena in the pub (see editorial).

The names and institutions were often in existence long before their appearance in the scanty records. The earliest reference to “the Inn known as Oastriche” occurs in October 1648.² A bird familiar to folklore since the 13th century, its name appears in a range of different spellings, as ostrig, ostrice, ostridge, esterige, estryche, eastrich and eastridge. The inn perhaps bore the sign of a large ostrich-like bird, though the sign-painter may never have seen an ostrich. Deloney’s inn is The Crane, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that an ornithologist was the first to remark in 1678 that ‘crane’ could be used generically of any large bird, such as a stork, the crane itself being formerly abundant in England. From the 13th century, the stork could also be interchangeable with the ostrich, a bird familiar in folklore. While Colnbrook also had The Pelican, this latter bird possessed its own iconography in Christianity as a symbol of Christ. If Deloney’s inn is modelled on any establishment in Colnbrook, The Ostrich is the strongest contender.

So what of Jarman? Parish records mention no one of this name either in Horton, the parish in which Colnbrook is situated, or Langley its neighbour. There was a man with the similar name John Germeyn there in 1332, one of the richer parishioners, and we find among the baptisms in Horton, in the year 1575, the baptism of ‘Jarmayne’, a daughter of ‘John Jarmayne’.³ His own baptism, if local, is not on record because the register commences in 1572. Nor is his death recorded, so we must assume that John



“THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT ABOUT THE MURDERS. A LEGEND JUST CAN’T START BY ITSELF”

died and was buried elsewhere. ‘Germeyn’ and ‘Jarmayne’ are the same surname, and it would therefore appear that an established family with a name like Jarman could be found in Colnbrook in Deloney’s time. Calling the innkeeper Jarman, however, was a bit

like naming the barman ‘Potboy’ to denote his profession in the novel. Deloney may have named him for no other reason. Nor is there any record of a Jarman or Jarmayne standing trial for murder at the London assizes, nor of murders at The Ostrich. In the novel, the culprits are hanged.

The first history of the parish, however, does link murders to The Ostrich. Gordon Gyll, writing in 1862, relays what he calls a ‘local tradition’. In the reign of Edward I (1272-1307) the bodies of 13 murdered persons were supposedly taken from The Ostrich to be hurled into the Thames. One slipped from the cart and landed on a strip of land called Welly, which separated the parishes of Horton and Datchet. Horton refused to bury the body, and because Datchet agreed to do so, Datchet that day claimed the land and received the rates for



TOP: Television’s *Most Haunted* team visited The Ostrich in 2002. ABOVE: The inn’s ‘Elizabethan Room’.

it. What is curious about the story is that it bears no relation to the one told by Thomas Deloney. It implicates the unnamed innkeeper, who must have arranged for the disposal of the victims, but apart from the similarity with Jarman's arrangements of throwing bodies down a well and dumping Cole in a river, the details differ, and the story relates to a disputed parish boundary.

ENTER THE GHOSTS

Such was the stage on which ghosts began to appear. The first record of them is from the early 1970s. It is a mark of its novelty that neither Jack Hallam, author of *The Haunted Inns of England* (1972), nor Antony D Hippisley Coxe, author of *Haunted Britain* (1973), was aware of any haunting at The Ostrich. Nor were the authors of the indispensable *Folklore, Myths and Legends of Britain*, published by Reader's Digest in 1973, which includes an entry about the inn and Deloney's story of the murders. It is the first book, incidentally, to associate Deloney's account with The Ostrich. Where ghosts were reported it mentions them. None are noted at The Ostrich.

It was another book, published that same year, which brought the inn to the attention of ghost hunters. Marc Alexander's *Haunted Inns* (1973) relied on the landlord Derek Lamont, who told the author: "I feel there can be no doubt about the murders. A legend like that just can't start by itself." Lamont showed Alexander a window in an upstairs toilet through which the Jarman's were said to have peered into the adjoining bedroom to check that their victims were asleep. A working model of the tipping bed was kept in the bar. It had been copied a few years ago, "from a much earlier one which had worn out with age and use". The ghosts were thought to be those of the guests who perished in the cauldron.

Thirty years later they moved from stage to screen. It was the era of paranormal investigation, characterised by an eclectic mix of occult crafts, such as dowsing and mediumship, and scientific apparatus, such as the Gauss meter, digital camera, and electronic thermometer. In an episode of *Most Haunted* filmed in 2002, presenter Yvette Fielding, parapsychologist Jason Karl and medium Derek Acorah conducted a vigil at The Ostrich at the invitation of the landlord Daniel Swan. In accordance with the usual format, Acorah is led there



ABOVE: The model of Jarman's tipping bed, with its vat of boiling oil below, still kept in the bar of The Ostrich and apparently based on a "much earlier one which wore out with age and use".

separately and viewers are told that the location and its history are unknown to him. Fielding introduces the venue, setting Deloney's story in the era of Gyll's but mentioning neither: "It's said that in the 14th century an evil landlord called Jarman committed gruesome murders..." and so on. Meanwhile, Karl looks for 'disturbances' with an electromagnetic field detector and uses a thermal gun to search for cold spots. Acorah arrives. Employing psychometry, he touches parts of the building and objects to 'tune in'. Swan, talking with Fielding, identifies the 'Blue Room' above the kitchen as the lethal chamber. He says it's "a bit daunting at night time". Fielding cites words from Deloney's novel, referring to the Jarman's habit of calling a victim "a big fat pig", but viewers are never told that it is fiction. She shows where the trapdoor was, over the deep-fat fryer in the kitchen. In a detail new to the legend, she adds that Jarman stored the bodies in the pantry.

Acorah is now 'tuned in'. He picks up the names 'Jarman' and 'Thomas Cole', sensing

that Jarman was an evil man who killed lots of people. Drawn dramatically into the kitchen with the aid of his spirit-guide 'Sam', he becomes visibly distressed, remarking "a lot of souls lost their lives here". Acorah then begins to gasp for breath and enacts the experience of being boiled to death in what he describes as "a big tub". Karl asks whether they can talk with Jarman, but the latter is unresponsive. Acorah has to leave the kitchen, still recovering from his oppressive experience. At 3am he leads them to the loft, where he senses that 'a book – a history' is hidden. Then a subtitle flashes up on the screen: "History Book: Published in 1632. The Book holds accounts of alleged murders at the Inn". Fielding states twice in the commentary that it is a 'history' book. The reference can only be to Deloney's sixth edition (1632). If compared with other editions (e.g., fourth, 1612; fifth, 1623; seventh, 1636; eighth, 1676), it reveals no change in our story. The team leave without being able to speak with Jarman.

A GHOST HUNT

After the programme was aired, the Ghost Club arranged three investigations at The Ostrich in late 2003. I was fortunate enough to attend the second of these (1-2 November 2003), and the third, and to be in a position of never having watched *Most Haunted* and of knowing nothing about the alleged ghostly phenomena, though I did recall reading about the murders in the Reader's Digest volume. We were shown the model of the tipping bed, which was gathering dust in a small glass case. Later in the evening we were also shown the blocked-up window between the 'Blue Room' and the upstairs toilet. Prior to this we were given the chance to wander around, so that investigators like me who knew nothing of the setting might get the feel of the place. Normally the upstairs rooms were closed to the public, or used only for functions, but on this occasion the landlord, Peter – new since the filming of the TV programme – opened them up.

I started my tour, alone. This is part of the account I wrote that night in 2003:

Walking out of the 'Elizabethan Room', the next room I entered was a small bar behind it. The lights were off. I cast my eyes around and after a short while left the room. Next I entered the room next door, the 'Blue Room'. This was just before 11.05pm and



again the lights were off. As I stood inside my face started to flush and tingle and I sensed such an oppressive feeling of hostility and discomfort growing on me that I could not bear to stay in the room and made a hasty exit. As I left I shuddered violently and shook, but once I went back into the corridor again, I felt fine.

Later I returned to the room a couple of times, once with a similar result and then on an occasion when others were in there, and the atmosphere seemed less thick. On the fourth approach, when the room was empty and in darkness, I noted the following in the report:

This time, however, I approached it alone and stood outside the door, peering in to the darkened room. As I stood there I suddenly felt such a strong sense that something within the room was dashing out towards me from around the corner that I started and, rather unprofessionally, ran off.

At 1.30am, having told this to no one, I was talking with a fellow investigator, Jean, in the bar downstairs, who said that she had sensed a very oppressive atmosphere in an upstairs room and described it as the room that “pushes you out”. It turned out to be the ‘Blue Room’. Some in the group claimed to have communicated with spirits, or sensed a ghostly presence, or detected strange phenomena with electronic gadgets.

THEATRE OF SPIRITS

Fast-forward 10 years, to the age of immersive theatre. It’s 2013 and *The Drowned Man: A Hollywood Fable* is showing in London, if ‘showing’ is the correct word, for the theatre company Punchdrunk has taken over an old postal sorting office and transformed it into a detailed set on multiple levels. Participants – the audience – are given anonymous masks and invited to wander around, immersing themselves in this complex stage and gaining insights into the characters, as the actors appear and perform their parts on a perpetual loop around them.⁴ Perhaps Jarman was there too, though there was no boiling alive enacted on this



TOP: The ‘Blue Room’ – now used as a storeroom – where the author reported some strange experiences.
ABOVE: A stained glass window behind the bar showing Jarman’s notorious bed tipping its occupant into the cauldron below.

occasion, only the drowning of one central character. Yet the ingredients of immersive theatre are similar to those of the modern phenomenon of paranormal investigation, which *Most Haunted* and more recent shows have done so much to shape. A stage is needed – an ancient inn? – with a story and characters. Murders are always good, the grislier the better. Throw in a few props: a model of a tipping bed, a secret window, a trapdoor. Give some to the participants to make it more immersive – if not masks, then thermal guns, or a Gauss meter. Punchdrunk should put on a play about a haunting. Ghost hunters should pass a night in a fairground House of Horror. (They have of course.)

So what of Jarman, that character from the pages of Shakespeare’s contemporary, Deloney? It is hard to avoid the impression that attempts to communicate with him at

The Ostrich are like visits to the Veronese tourist attraction known as ‘Juliet’s Tomb’ to speak with the ghost of Shakespeare’s tragic heroine. Failing that, one could try ‘Juliet’s Balcony’. The difference in Juliet’s case is that nobody suppresses the fact that she is a fictional character, whereas in Jarman’s case, individuals ranging from Marc Alexander to the production team of *Most Haunted* have encouraged us to believe not only that he was real, but also that his spectre haunts The Ostrich. A similar approach is observable in the two seasons of *Great British Ghosts* (2011, 2012), presented by Michaela Strachan, in which guest ‘experts’ and ‘historians’ turn out to be ghost aficionados who may or may not have historical training. Were I to appear on telly with the subtitle of ‘plumber’, viewers might reasonably infer that I could fix a boiler, whether or not the fault was blamed on gremlins. This veneer of history, like the veneer of science enveloping the hobby in its wizardry of gadgets, lends an air of authority to a pursuit that is experiential. It implies that ghosts operate within bounds of known disciplines as we comprehend them.

Strange things happen, such as my experiences at The Ostrich. Tales like the one about Jarman perform a useful function, for by imposing coherence and meaning upon unexplained phenomena they keep a haunting alive. If there is a story, an audience has the option of tying phenomena – bumps, thumps, shadows, and the like – in with that story, thereby reinforcing and perpetuating it, while at the same time using it to explain such phenomena. We might end up ascribing significance to anomalies we would scarcely notice elsewhere, such as temperature drops, a cold draught, tingly sensations, an unexplained sound, a flash of light in the corner of the eye... The question for paranormal researchers is whether the same stories that keep hauntings alive also cloud our judgement and deter real observation. Jarman may have been real, but if he is merely a fiction enlisted to give meaning to activity at The Ostrich, it remains to be asked what really is happening there... **FI**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



DR TOM LICENCE is a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of East Anglia, a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries.

NOTES

¹ Merritt E. Lawlis, *The Novels of Thomas Deloney* (Indiana 1961), p.xxvi, and see Eugene Wright, *Thomas Deloney*, Twayne’s English Authors Series 323 (Boston 1981).

² Deeds and Records, Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society Records 5 (1943) p.28.

³ Gordon Gyll, *History of the parish of Wraybury, Ankerwycke Priory ... with the History of Horton and the Town of Colnbrook, Bucks* (London 1862), p.257.

⁴ On this phenomenon generally see Josephine Machon, *Immersive Theatres: Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

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THE SPECTRE OF THE FERRY BOAT INN

THE MAKING OF A MODERN GHOST STORY

ROBERT HALLIDAY pops into one of Cambridgeshire's most historic inns for a pint and a spot of ghost-hunting - but is this classic pub haunting all it's cracked up to be?

Juliet Tewsley's ghost haunts the historic Ferry Boat Inn in the picturesque riverside village of Holywell. In 1050, the 19-year-old Juliet was spurned by Thomas Zoul, the man she loved. Hanging herself in grief on 17 March, she was buried beside the path to the ferry, and a stone laid on her grave. Years passed and the Ferry Boat Inn was built over the stone. On the anniversary of her death, her ghost rises to point to her grave, one of the longest-lasting apparitions in the British Isles.

This persistent legend has become an accepted part of British ghostlore. It contains some of the best elements of a classic 'true' ghost story: a scenic rural village, an innocent victim, an unsympathetic villain, characters one can care about, a story that leaves one wishing for more details, verifiable folklore (suicides were buried at crossroads) and an association with the legendary past – all centred on a pub in which to enjoy a convivial drink waiting for the ghost to appear.

It is therefore a pity that investigation proves the legend to be a modern invention, promulgated almost by accident in 1953. The legend shows not so much how unquiet spirits become ghosts, as how an invented story can become accepted as true.

CONTACTING JULIET

Holywell is a small village in Huntingdonshire, one of England's smallest counties, which was merged into Cambridgeshire in 1974. Beside the River Ouse, 12 miles (19 km) west of Cambridge, and three miles (5km) east of St Ives, its name derives from a spring beside the churchyard. A picture-book example of an English rural village, it attracted an artistic colony in the 20th century.¹

The Ferry Boat Inn lies at the east end of Holywell. Until the 1930s, innkeepers

rowed people over the Ouse. The ferry is mentioned in Charles Kingsley's historical novel *Hereward The Wake* (1866). In chapter 30, 'How Hereward played the potter', he escapes the Normans by crossing the river here. The Inn is mostly 18th century, but parts date to the 16th.²

The legend of Juliet Tewsley was, in fact, created by the psychic researcher Anthony Donald Cornell, better known as Tony Cornell. Born in Histon, near Cambridge, in 1923, Tony investigated local ghost stories while still a teenager. Naval service in WWII took him to India, where he met 'holy men' whose spiritual powers impressed him. He studied at Cambridge University, graduating in 1949, becoming the leading member of the Cambridge University Society For Psychical Research (CUSPR).³

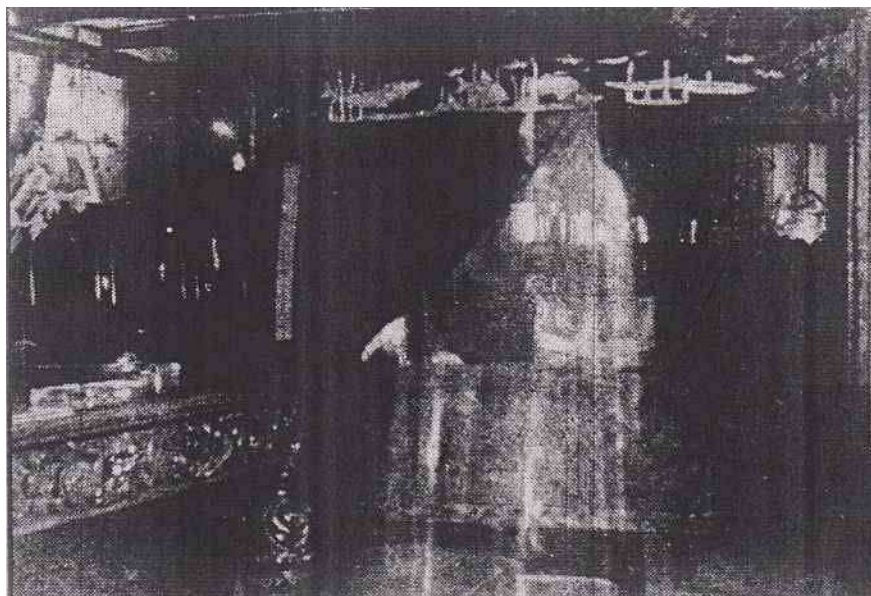
In 1953, Tony, his then girlfriend

(whom he called 'Miss BM') and three acquaintances (David Wright and a married couple, Roy and Brenda) heard that a 'White Lady' materialised in the Ferry Boat Inn every 17 March, to point to the flagstone that marked her grave, which became loose that night. They decided to visit on the night of 17 March. Finding that the flagstone was loose, they stood on it, rocking it, while inviting the ghost to appear (which they never seriously expected to happen). Borrowing a tin tray from the bar, they wrote an alphabet around the edge, upturned a wineglass on it and held a makeshift séance. Finding this amusing, the locals and barman joined in. Over 45 minutes they received answers to 17 questions.

Who are you?

"I am Juliet".

Where did you die?



TOP: A photograph of Juliet Tewsley, the Ferry Boat Inn ghost, supposedly taken in 1953 and printed on the front page of the *Peterborough Citizen and Advertiser* on 1 February 1955.



ABOVE: The Ferry Boat Inn, Holywell, Huntingdonshire, parts of which date back to the 16th century. **BELOW:** Tony Cornell, Cambridge researcher and poltergeist expert, photographed in 1961 carrying a trunk of CUSPR equipment. Earlier, in 1953, he and some friends had tried to contact the 'White Lady' of the Ferry Boat Inn.

"Here".
How did you die?
"Hanged"
Why were you hanged?
"Because I loved Thomas".
When did you die?
"1050".
Is your grave in this room?
"Yes"
Under the stone?
"Yes".

The glass spelt "Here I find peace" and "I am lonely and speak".

After the Ferry Boat closed Tony and his friends continued the séance on a 'Ouija' board in the Blue Boar Inn opposite Trinity College in Cambridge. The ghost's second name was Tewslie; she hanged herself on 17 March 1050, for love of Thomas Zoul, a woodcutter.

The five psychic researchers had often participated in séances, and admitted that the messages were produced by their own minds: experience had probably made them adept at moving the indicator to spell answers. The names were historically inconsistent with 1050: 'Juliet' was possibly chosen because of Shakespeare's tragic love story, and while 'Thomas' is a Biblical name, it only became popular after Thomas Becket's martyrdom in Canterbury in 1170. Tewsley and Zoul are very unusual surnames, besides which, hereditary surnames were not commonly used in England until the 13th century.⁴ Nobody bearing either name has been traced in Holywell (or elsewhere). There was also the question of how an 11th century

THEY STOOD ON THE FLAGSTONE WHILE INVITING THE GHOST TO APPEAR



Anglo-Saxon could communicate in 20th century English.

Tony Cornell later said he and his friends were unsure how they had heard the ghost story. They searched printed sources and asked Holywell residents for information without success.⁵

HUNTING FOR JULIET

The episode might have been forgotten were it not for the fact that in the following year, 1954, Jack Rodd, the landlord of the Ferry Boat Inn, invited Tony Cornell to conduct another investigation on 17 March with eight other CUSPR members, promising them a free meal. Mr Rodd was more interested in increasing trade than investigating the paranormal. The *Cambridge Daily News* announced a 'h(a)unting day' for Juliet 'Tousley', when tape recorders and infra-red sensors would prove her existence. The *Huntingdonshire Post* asked: "Will mystery of Holywell's woman in white be laid?" After 900 years, psychic workers and journalists would greet the ghost. The séance messages were reported, with some reservations expressed, but in a way that lent them credibility. Mrs Rodd said she had not heard about the ghost until the previous year, yet the supposed gravestone, always immobile, rocked when stood on last 17 March. Tom Arnold, a pub regular expressed doubts, but said that once he had heard the pub door open and a cough for attention when nobody was there.⁶

Jack Rodd applied to the bench of magistrates to extend opening hours "to explore a legend" by looking for a female



ABOVE LEFT: The author points out the flagstone that supposedly marks the grave of Juliet Tewlesley in the bar of the Ferry Boat Inn. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The *Daily Herald* of 18 March 1954 reports on the ghost hunt. **FACING PAGE:** On the following day, the same newspaper tells of the experiment's unsuccessful conclusion.

ghost. The chair of the bench asked: "Do you think she will appear?" Jack Rodd replied: "I hope not. If the ghost does appear my wife will disappear!" While thinking it rather silly, the magistrates granted an extension. The *Huntingdonshire Post* gave this front-page coverage. The *Daily Mail* reported that: "The white lady (aged 900) has positively promised to try a materialisation... Never has such a reception been prepared for an habitual haunter as has been laid on at the Ferry Boat Inn for tomorrow night". (It is unclear how the ghost had promised to appear. Had the press interviewed her?)⁷

On 17 March 1954, press reporters and a BBC radio team had booked every spare room in the Ferry Boat Inn. The bar, and an emergency second bar were packed, and

"DOORS BANG AT NIGHT AND THINGS ARE MOVED FROM THEIR PLACES"

people crowded outside looking through the windows. Cars blocked the approach road and the village streets. The CUSPR members manfully tried to maintain a ghost watch surrounded by flashing cameras, inquisitive reporters and drinkers. During a 'Ouija' board session they received the message "I am trying to materialise", followed by

"Look Tim". Tim West, the CUSPR secretary, stood while a white sheet was placed over his chair, but nothing was seen and sonic equipment failed to register anything. The psychic researchers abandoned a far from solitary vigil at 2am, dispirited, literally and metaphorically. Tony ruefully recalled that, despite the trade they brought Jack Rodd, they never received their promised meal.⁸

The *Daily Herald* reported that "at dawn yesterday disappointed ghost hunters left the Ferry Boat Inn and the village returned to reality." Alexander George McLennan Pearce Higgins, the rector of Holywell, was quoted as saying "the legend is bunkum. No one has seen Juliet and no one ever will". A letter from Juliet 'Teuslie' in the *Huntingdonshire Post* said: "I've been dead for centuries, very

dead, and on no account would I satisfy the thirsty curiosity of a few worldly humans to see me... My grave was excavated 40 years ago and no trace of my mortal remains was found".⁹

INVENTING JULIET

The Revd. Higgins wrote a short story, 'The spectre of Holywell', embroidering the tale with new details, saying Juliet was buried by the ferry path as a suicide. (The practice of burying suicides at crossroads, documented from the 16th century, was abolished in 1823. It might derive from a belief that this confused the suicide's ghost, preventing it returning to haunt its home.) Juliet's spirit lingered while the inn was built over her grave, until a ghost hunter arrived one day and she promised to return every year. (The narrative mentioned Shakespeare, perhaps a jibe at the origin of Juliet's name.) Revd. Higgins concluded by saying that everything he had written was imaginary, since Juliet never existed.¹⁰

The following year, the *Farmer's Weekly* wrote that watching for Juliet Tewsley, "Britain's prettiest and liveliest ghost", every 17 March was an age-old custom, citing her story as a documented historical fact. It was said (incorrectly) that the bar room turned cold and a blue mist appeared during Tony Cornell's séance. This elicited a reply from Revd. Higgins, repeating his story, but omitting the disclaimer that it was made up; perhaps it was thought nobody would pay attention.¹¹

By 1955, a press feature on the Ferry Boat Inn could embellish the newly created legend even further. Juliet was "the life and soul of every party and was nearly always crowned Queen of May", while Thomas Zoul was "a broad shouldered well-built young man with a handsome face and curly black hair" who "preferred a game of ninepins and a glass of ale to the company of girls". While Tony Cornell's investigations were reported in an ambivalent fashion, it was stated that "many people claim to have seen the ghost", although none were quoted or identified. Perhaps the legend's growing popularity had fuelled a claim that the Ferry Boat Inn dated to the 11th century. A new landlord, Aidan Farwell said: "I don't believe in ghosts myself. But there is definitely something strange



about the place. The dogs bark and run from the room with the hair on their necks bristling. Doors bang at night and things are moved from their proper places."

There were plans to call in the RAF with radar equipment to prove Juliet's existence.¹²

Popular books about ghost stories have since told Juliet's story as a traditional folk tale or even a historical event, often adding fresh details for dramatic effect while ignoring any historical inconsistencies. *The Ghost Hunter's Road Book* said that 17 March was known as 'Juliet's Day' in Holywell. The landlord told Peter Underwood, a prolific author on the supernatural: "The dog will not go near the gravestone, and of course the local women don't come near the inn on March 17". *Haunted Inns Of England* claimed that 17 March attracted revellers from around the world; *The Haunted Pub Guide* said the last person to see the ghost died in the 1960s (an irritatingly vague statement); *Haunted Pubs In Britain And Ireland* added that the pub was sometimes filled with mysterious music, which only women could hear, while dogs growled and bristled when taken near the stone. Juliet received an entry in *The Ghosts' Who's Who*,¹³ and in 1991 Joe Newell, a 70-year-old resident, wrote a history of Holywell asserting that the legend of Juliet Tewsley was essentially true: she had gained full acceptance.¹⁴

Joan Forman, one of the few popular

authors to investigate ghost stories objectively, visited Holywell in the early 1970s. Tom Arnold (mentioned in an early press report) told her that in 1953 Jack Rodd had wanted to boost trade. The Loch Ness Monster was in the news, and when it was suggested that a similar story might bring visitors to Holywell, Tom told the story of the White Lady, saying it was an old tale he had heard from his grandparents. [15] Was this a false memory, when Tom re-imagined the events of the 1950s 20 years later? Or did Tom's grandparents really tell him the story? Or did Tom invent it for the occasion? Perhaps an imagined folktale grew unpredictably.

On 17 March 2003 I attended a Ghost Club event chaired by FT's own Alan Murdie at the Ferry Boat Inn, celebrating the story's 50th anniversary. Local folk singers performed ditties about Juliet, saying these dated to the 18th century: it seemed impolite to tell them this could not be the case. An amateur séance produced no messages. Tony Cornell, as guest of honour, regaled us with an account of his exploits. A conscientious investigator, he thought that, while some of over 500 cases he investigated could not be explained by natural cases, most were caused by human susceptibility, or even outright fraud. It was amusing that one of Tony's least successful investigations created one of Britain's best-known ghost stories.

March 17 usually brings some extra drinkers to the Ferry Boat, and a few other visitors arrived. These included a couple from Peterborough who said they last visited on the night of 17 March 1993, by pure coincidence, not knowing that the inn was supposed to be haunted. On that occasion, they saw a strange light in the windows, which the pub staff could not explain. Perhaps something really does happen at the Ferry Boat on 17 March after all... **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



ROBERT HALLIDAY has worked for various heritage organisations, including the Churches Conservation Trust. His publications include *Cambridge Ghosts*,

co-authored with Alan Murdie and *Cambridgeshire Strange But True*.

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Social media, cyberspace and spirits...

CHRIS SAUNDERS dims the lights, logs on and joins “The First Ever Live Digital Facebook Séance”



CHRIS SAUNDERS has written for *FT* on Welsh portents, the 27 Club, the Boston bombing and Chinese UFOs. He writes fiction under the name of CM Saunders.

People will do anything to get ahead in marketing, but posters, print ads, celebrity endorsements and TV trailers just don't cut it any more. Even the Internet, with its limitless possibilities, is often just more of the same: sleek (and not-so-sleek) YouTube videos and clever viral marketing campaigns are ten a penny. To make your book/album/set of garden shears truly stand out from the crowd, you need to be both innovative and creative. You have to take risks, and do things that haven't been done before. That's why the people behind one of this year's would-be supernatural blockbusters, *The Darkness* (from the producers of *Insidious* and *The Purge*) decided to hold what was billed as “The First Ever Live Digital Facebook Séance”.

Yes. A séance. Via Facebook. Attended virtually by thousands of people from all over the world and hosted by Spanish-speaking ‘celebrity medium’ Mistica Maria Louisa and Britt Griffith, who once got himself fired from the cast of *Ghost Hunters* and who confesses to “no longer investigating unarmed”.¹

It all sounded as far removed from an antiquated Victorian parlour as you could get, and the presence of a volatile gun nut who thinks he can shoot ghosts made the spectacle irresistible. What could possibly go wrong?

Well, anyone who's tried arranging so much as a conference call knows that anything, and possibly everything, can go wrong where technology is involved. But as long as my laptop didn't get possessed and I wasn't on the same continent as Britt Griffith, I was game.

And so, at 3am on Friday 6 May (7pm PDT), I make a pot of coffee, log on to Facebook from my home in East Finchley, and sit there expectantly.

Nothing happens.

The comment box soon starts filling



up with things like, “Has it started yet?” “I don't see anything”, and “What do we do?”

Then a lady helpfully informs us that we are all on the wrong page. Doh! Refresh. Suddenly we see Britt sitting at a table in a darkened room with a load of candles and some fancy ghost hunting equipment. He doesn't appear to be armed. There's a quick movie intro and some spiel about the Anasazi, the ancient Native American culture that plays a central role in the plot; then Madam Mistica shows up with a translator in tow. She immediately announces that there are “about 20” presences in the room, some representing the Anasazi, but they won't talk to us because they are shy. Okay...

Instead, Britt asks viewers to provide their names and dates of birth and ask a question, which Madam Mistica will attempt to answer after selecting a ‘victim’. I ask who killed JFK. Disappointingly, my question is ignored. Other questions from curious observers include: “Is Hillary Clinton the Antichrist?” “Where are my keys?” “Can ghosts use Facebook?” “Am I going to get laid tonight?” “Should I wear my black shoes or the brown ones?” “Who's going to win the NBA Playoffs?” and, hilariously, “Do they know it's Christmas?”

Someone else asks simply, “What the fuck is going on?” while another doesn't ask anything, instead typing “I WANT BLOOD” repeatedly, which is a bit disconcerting. One poor soul leaves in a huff after apparently thinking they were

about to see a live stream by the band The Darkness.

As of now, there are 1.6k viewers, and a question is finally selected.

“Is my mother watching over me?”

“Yes. Always.”

1.4k.

“Is my brother okay in the afterlife?”

“Yes. Oh, wait! No, he's not okay. He needs help. We should all pray for him.”

Right on cue, one of Britt's EMF detectors goes off. There's more film guff, and Madam Mistica says the spirits are making the candles flicker.

1.1k.

“Where's my daughter?” (Somewhere in the world, a game of hide-and-seek must have gone terribly wrong.)

“I don't know where she is. Maybe she went to the beach.”

“My mother just died from lung cancer. Is she doing good?” (Personally, I don't think you need a medium to answer that question.)

Question of the night comes from Britt himself, who chips in with: “Have the Anasazi seen the movie yet?”

“No. But they are very happy they are being remembered.”

A few commenters pick up on the fact that Madam Mistica is skilfully ducking answering any real questions – like whether or not Suge Knight offed Tupac. She does mention, however, that we shouldn't light candles in our bedrooms because it's a fire hazard, and that lemons offer protection. Whether she thinks lemons offer protection against spirits or fire isn't clear. The Anasazi don't want to talk to us any more. They are ‘afraid’. Probably of Britt.

893.

Finally, after 75 minutes of excruciating dullness, the “First Ever Live Digital Facebook Séance” draws to a close. As a marketing ploy, it seemed to work. For a while. It generated a lot of online discussion, even if most of it was tongue-in-cheek. But the fact that the broadcast lost almost 50 per cent of its viewers before the end and the organisers didn't seem to know what a séance actually entails, means that ultimately the event has to go in the ‘epic fail’ column. **FT**

NOTES

1 <https://gnostalgia.wordpress.com/2010/10/03/the-dark-side-of-britt-griffith/>

You can watch the event ‘as live’ here: <https://www.facebook.com/TheDarknessMov/>



Ghosties and ghoulies and low-lighty beasties

STU NEVILLE ponders fads and fashions in fortean-themed television



STU NEVILLE is a teacher and administrator of the FT online forum. He believes/doesn't believe in a whole range of things, depending on how tired he is.

For a number of years now, a fixture of the evening television schedules has been the spectacle of people filmed in infrared looking for oddness, either actively pursuing it or sitting passively waiting for it to manifest itself. Hundreds, probably thousands of hours of this kind of stuff is shown on numerous channels of varying appeal and quality – ranging from the “how are they still broadcasting?” likes of UKTV Pick+1+24 (average viewership 11) to the otherwise respectable Discovery-subsidary Animal Planet.

For British viewers, the first series to really popularise this kind of gonzo-paranormal investigation was *Most Haunted*, in which emeritus Blue Peter presenter Yvette Fielding, her (apparently) Samurai husband Karl and the pantomime Scouse medium Derek ‘Deggsy’ Acorah, along with co-opted members of their film-crew, went to reputedly haunted spots around Britain and then spent the night attempting to capture evidence on camera. Next day, the footage would be reviewed and a parapsychologist wheeled in to provide some semblance of balance. So far, so what? The fact that it so eerily mirrored the BBC’s infamous 1992 hoax

Ghostwatch (see FT67:38-42; 166:36-41), complete with excitable shrieking and alleged events *nearly* caught on tape (it became a kind of recurring motif: loud noise; “EEK! WHAT WAS THAT?”; camera swings round to see vase on floor, and so on) ensured that most of the early adopters were, broadly, people looking for a late-night laugh, or the kind of channel-flicking flaneur that teleshopping relies upon; but after a while, word got around and it developed its devotees. Many were there for the hilarious activities of Deggsy (not for nothing is the production company responsible called Antix); what was perhaps more worrying was that many others with limited (or no) critical faculties started taking it all very seriously... particularly when it came to the subject of orbs.

Orbs, depending on your need to believe, are either illuminated dust-motes and/or digital recording artefacts, or they are spirits in the ‘residual’. Ooh, they love some residual, do *Most Haunted* fans. As did the presenters: at the first sight of these

Many tuned in for the hilarious activities of Derek Acorah

completely explicable little flying lights Derek would scamper over and start communicating with them via his spirit guide, Sam. At this point the full-on vaudeville of Acorah’s schtick would come roaring into life: wandering around a 400-year-old pub in some historic English town, Derek would confidently assert there was a man there, called John, who was a father with children. Frowning, eyes closed and with his fingertips brushing his temple like a spectral Timotei advert, Deggsy took more counsel from Sam. “He wore a coat of some kind... and sat in this pub drinking beer... often... and he had legs.” Derek had a thing about legs. Anyone who witnessed his capering, gleeful evocation of a little girl dancing up a mossy tower somewhere or other will never forget it. Often as not there’d be a séance with the crew, the tumbler on the table spelling out some portent or another (and conveniently backing up whatever Derek was shrieking about earlier). But such activities were only the appetiser – the main course was yet to come.

They’d split up into twos and threes and on would come the green lighting (or possibly blue – I’m colour blind, forgive me). In this eerie atmosphere Deggsy and co would station themselves about the place and wait for stuff to happen. And wait some more. Now, I’ve been on ghost hunts. Ninety-nine per cent of any ghost hunt is sitting still, getting chilly and wondering if there’s any coffee left in your thermos, until you emerge, stiff, grey and shivering into the thin morning light having heard an odd creak at 3.17am and absolutely nothing else – none of which makes for riveting telly. So, what’s a producer to do? Leave the tapes running in the sincere hope that something happens to reward the viewer’s patience, in full knowledge that an hour of bugger-all in greenish (blueish?) low-level light isn’t very exciting, and, further, is unlikely to provoke return visits? Or do they, shall we say, help it all along a bit, with or without the consent, or indeed knowledge, of the participants? (Bear in mind that two of the principal participants were also producers, which might go some way to explain the show’s suspiciously high phenomena hit-rate).

By this time, however, like Borley or Roswell, *MH* had a momentum all its own. No matter how damning any evidence against it might have been, it had a core of true believers that would accept no dissent. I still shudder to recall the sight of parapsychologist Ciarán O’Keefe being booed in one of *MH*’s risible “live” episodes for daring



ABOVE: Derek Acorah, *Most Haunted*’s full-on vaudevillian.

LEFT: The greenish (blueish?) hues of the show’s iconic infrared world.

to suggest that there might be a simple explanation for a creaking stair – such as someone walking on it – as opposed to a ghost called Henry, who, according to Acorah, had more than one eye and a nose of some sort, and wore a hat sometimes...

MH ran initially for 14 series before grinding to a halt in 2011, by which time the ratings had finally hit a decline (it has since been re-commissioned). Before it departed however, it had spawned a whole mini-industry. First of all there was *TAPS*, aka *Ghost Hunters*, which appeared in the US in 2003 – same basic premise but much less camp – and within a few years you couldn't move for mediums. Part of the genre's success was undoubtedly down to timing: public interest in fortean subjects tends to be very cyclical, and when *MH* premiered the 1990s UFO mania had died away and ghosts were on the ascendant. By 2012, however, the spooks were in decline, and the beasties were on the up. TV cryptozoology had arrived.

Destination Truth, or *Monster Hunter* (depending on which side of the pond you were viewing), started on the SciFi channel (now SyFy) in 2007. Initially, Josh Gates and his intrepid team went all over the globe looking solely for anomalous beasts at night in bluey (greeny?) light – though they have since branched out to include other phenomena, doing a fairly honest job of it (when explanations *could* be found for anomalous footage the team were quick to acknowledge this). Their adventures rattled along and they did capture some interesting stuff, not all of it instantly dismissable. Of course, none of it was conclusive either: as with any programme that promises big revelations, if they were that significant we'd have heard about them long before broadcast. The show continues to this day and remains relatively un-hysterical and measured.

Neither of these adjectives, however, can be applied to *Finding Bigfoot*. Proudly carried by Animal Planet, *FB* is pretty much *Scooby Doo* made flesh. The format never varies: the team of four are driving along in an SUV in natty fleeces, and discuss where they're going. Matt MoneyMaker, the Bigfoot Research Organisation's (BFRO) leader, and the Freddy of the team, will explain he was last there a few years ago and thought it very "squatchy". They then roll up to said area, and immediately agree that yes, it's squatchy. Everywhere is squatchy, it seems. And whereas it's relatively easy to accept the possible existence of a large ultra-elusive



mammal in the vast and 99 per cent uninhabited Pacific Northwest, its presence in an area the size of my local park seems less feasible, somehow. I should add that they all agree except Renee, a sort of extended Velma, who is a biologist and doesn't believe in Bigfoot and therefore provides 'balance'. Getting back to the usual *FB* story, they then meet a local with evidence of some kind – a blurry, distant video clip, an indistinct recording of a howl – and immediately get Bobo, the Scooby of the group, to re-enact it. As Bobo toddles along, arm raised above his head to indicate the height of the reported creature (it's always eight feet, coincidentally the height of Bobo's extended hand), the others (except Renee) agree excitedly that the witnesses must have seen a Bigfoot, as nothing else is as big as that, not even Bobo with his hand up. Cue more meetings with locals, weirdly bad CGI re-enactments of encounters, and then the obligatory wander about a forest in greeny-blue light, wallowing trees and howling and excitedly spotting things on the thermoscope that turn out to be cows, or indeed one another. They then agree (except Renee) that the place is indeed squatchy, and that's the end of another episode. Oh yes, Cliff is Scrappy, obviously.

Take *Finding Bigfoot*, add steroids and moonshine, and you get *Mountain Monsters*. The team in this case consists of hugely grizzled, impressively bearded men with thick Appalachian accents and guns, who romp about their local area looking for cryptids of whom almost no one has ever heard. The locals *have* heard of these critters though, so the team pitch up in the woods to look for

ABOVE: Real-life *Scooby Doo*: the *Finding Bigfoot* team.

them. With evidence even shakier than that in *Finding Bigfoot*, they set about planning how to corner and snare the animal in question. The definite star of the team is the tracker 'Wild' Bill Neff, a clean-ish shaven Yosemite Sam in combat trousers and a baseball cap. When predicting the success of the forthcoming hunt, Bill unleashes a torrent of Southern gibberish, punctuated by finger-pointing and loud whoops. The team then set about building a different type of trap every week to capture 'it' (which, needless to say, they always fail to do). This takes an hour of oddly compulsive screen-time every week.

That the formerly po-faced Animal Planet sees fit to commission this sort of material may seem odd – but then it has of late itself produced documentaries on mermaids, the aquatic ape theory, and even one about the Dyatlov Pass incident that implicated a Menk (the local name for the the Russian Yeti) as the perpetrator. Maybe they are playing with our minds. Maybe by showing this material alongside legit documentaries they are blurring the edges of our world and how we perceive it... but it still leads to a problem.

What would happen if one of these low-light, live action Hanna-Barbera farragoes actually found some proper evidence? Would we accept it as fact? Given Discovery's recent propensity to yank our chains while keeping a straight face, would we buy it when they said, "Look, honest, we've got some real evidence! We mean it this time"? Or would we acknowledge the intention and admire the artifice, but know, in the end, that it proves nothing more than that what we see ain't necessarily so... no matter what colour the light is. **FT**

Power to the King!

ROB GANDY ponders the triumph of the Foxes as Leicester City celebrates a “football fairytale” and detects the tutelary hand of Richard III at work...



ROB GANDY is a visiting professor at the Liverpool Business School, John Moores University. He has written for *FT* on Merseyside dopelgängers, ghostlore, football curses and phantom hitchhikers.

Leicester City winning the English Premier League title in 2015/16 has been widely described as a “football fairytale”, given that this unfashionable provincial club had beaten a host of mega-rich, big-city clubs with squads valued at hundreds of millions of pounds to become champions for the first time in its 132-year history. This was particularly remarkable because the ‘Foxes’ (as they are nicknamed) narrowly avoided relegation in 2014/15, their first year back in the Premier League for over a decade. At the start of the season

bookies offered 5,000-1 for City to win the Premiership, and Claudio Ranieri, the new manager, was the short-priced favourite to be the first manager to be sacked.

It seems like a case of divine intervention – but some have pondered whether Richard III, the last Plantagenet King of England, who was killed at Bosworth Field in Leicestershire in 1485, might have played a part.¹ This is because there seem to be links between the finding of his skeleton under a Social Services car park in August 2012 (near the parking bay marked “R”: see FT299:4-5) and City’s rise to the top.

It should be noted that in August 2010, the club was bought by a Thai-led consortium, Asian Football Investments, fronted

by billionaire businessman Vichai Srivaddhanaprabha, founder and CEO of a duty-free retail company, which had agreed a three-year shirt sponsorship deal with the club. The company’s name? The *King Power Group*. The Group then bought the naming rights to club’s ground for the 2011/12 season – so it became the *King Power Stadium*. That season, City languished in middle table in the second-tier Championship. But it was at the end of 2011/12 that Richard’s remains were found, and from that point the club went onwards and upwards. It reached the play-offs in 2012/13 before topping the table and getting promotion to the Premier League in 2013/14, which coincided with the May 2014 judicial decision that Richard should be reburied in Leicester rather than York. York was proposed by the Plantagenet Alliance, who favoured reinterment in York Minster, arguing it had been the wish “of the last mediæval king of England” who was known as Richard of York.²

Obviously, what the Alliance had not taken into account was the fact that Richard was born in Fotheringhay, Northamptonshire, just over the border

BELOW: Buses carrying the Leicester squad and trophy make their way through the streets of Leicester on 16 May 2016. Note the King Power Stadium logo.



MICHAEL REGAN / GETTY IMAGES

from Leicestershire. So City was the nearest top-tier club to his birthplace – his local team.

Unfortunately, the 2014/15 season started badly for the Foxes, and got worse, seeing them anchored to the foot of the table at Christmas. Indeed, on 21 March 2015 they lost 4-3 to Tottenham Hotspur and languished in bottom place, seven points off safety, having drawn two and lost six of their previous eight league games. The form record was:

Played 29 Won 4 Drawn 7 Lost 18 Points 19 (Goals For 27; Goals Against 48)

It was the very next day, 22 March, that Richard III was reburied in Leicester Cathedral, just a mile from the *King Power Stadium*, with great ceremony, in something akin to a state funeral. There was live coverage from Channel 4 television throughout the day, and Leicester was packed with visitors (including me).³ From this date, somehow, Leicester City's fortunes completely turned around, with a run of seven wins in their last nine matches, drawing one and losing one – 22 points from a possible 27. This was the best form of any club in the Premier League over the last nine games, including the champions Chelsea (20 points) and big-spending Manchester City (21 points). They finished in 14th place, six points above the team relegated in 17th place (Hull City). Their final form record for the season was:

Played 38 Won 11 Drawn 8 Lost 19 Points 41 (Goals For 46; Goals Against 55)

The Foxes then continued this form into 2015/16, resulting in their winning the Premiership. Their record was:

Played 38 Won 23 Drawn 12 Lost 3 Points 81 (Goals For 68; Goals Against 36)

This means that in their last 47 Premiership matches their form was:

Played 47 Won 30 Drawn 13 Lost 4 Points 103 (Goals For 87; Goals Against 43)

This is simply phenomenal for any football club, and shows that City deserved to be champions. But the question remains whether Richard III somehow had the power to influence matters. It is worth noting that in ancient Greece, a city or sanctuary might claim to possess, without necessarily displaying, the remains of a venerated hero as part of a hero cult. The bones were not regarded as holding a particular power derived from the hero, with some exceptions, and miracles and healing were not regularly attributed to them; rather, their presence was meant to serve a tutelary function – to act as a deity or spirit who is a guardian, patron



CHRISTOPHER FURLONG / GETTY IMAGES



Football came to prominence in the early Middle Ages

or protector of a particular place, geographic feature, person, lineage, nation, culture or occupation. Therefore, now that Richard has a proper tomb, where people can

pay their respects (and a splendid Visitor Centre), perhaps he is playing this role for his local city and its football club? As football came to prominence in the early Middle Ages, when the first bouncing balls were invented, there is a (remote) possibility that he had an interest in the game when alive.⁴ Certainly, if Richard has a spirit that has survived death and maintained an interest in the sport, then it will have been delighted to have been reburied in Leicester rather than York – York City was relegated from the lowest tier of the Football League at the same time as the Foxes were raising the Premiership trophy!

Of course, anyone can make spurious links between different things to back up a tenuous argument. Perish the thought that a life-long Ricardian who lived in Leicester for over three years should stoop to such practices in this article! Nevertheless – congratulations to Leicester City on their great achievement. **FT**

TOP: The coffin containing the remains of King Richard III processes to Leicester Cathedral on 22 March 2015.

ABOVE: King Richard celebrates the Foxes' Premier League victory.

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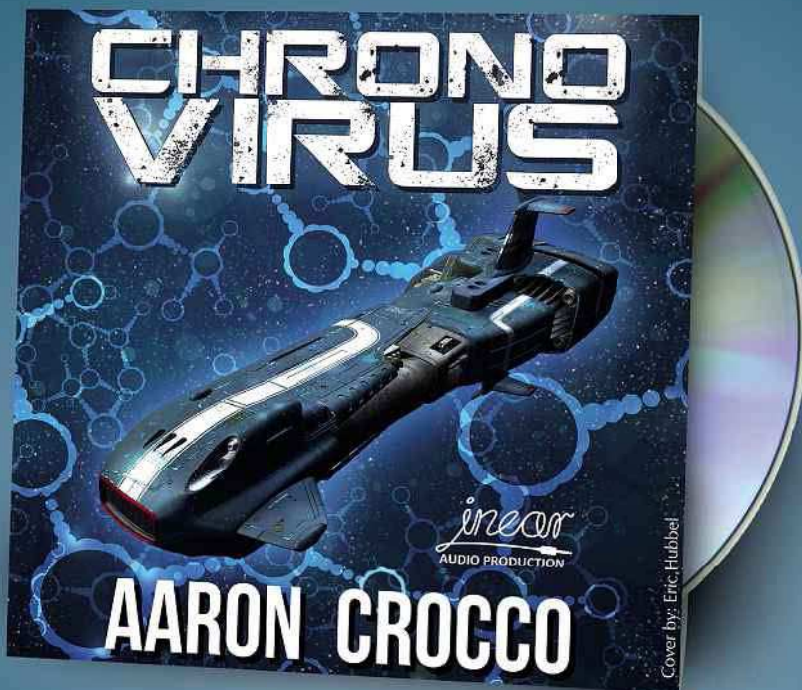
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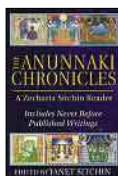
This month's books, films and games

reviews



Let's do the time warp again

A representative selection of Sitchin's writings exposes the flaws in his thinking and the mistakes he (and orthodoxy) has made – and the retro tech of his alien overlords



The Annunaki Chronicles

A Zechariah Sitchin Reader

Ed: Janet Sitchin

Bear and Company 2015

Hb, 375pp, ind, £18.99, ISBN 9781591432296

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £16.99

Zechariah Sitchin's obdurate legacy is difficult to avoid. A steady proportion of the books and articles published under the ægis of ancient mysteries is laced with, and based on, a platform of his theories, which have become, for some at least, the axioms of the alternative history of humanity. Online, his work underpins not just ancient mysteries, but also a whole sub-sect of the conspiracy theory community, and more extravagantly, an apocalyptic tranche dedicated to gleefully prophesying our imminent demise with the approach (it's always approaching) of the ominous planet Nibiru.

You can believe Sitchin's theories and see him as the quintessential prophet of the age, or you can deride him as a nutcase fantasist of the palpably absurd ancient alien cult, but you can't deny his enormous influence on the ideas and beliefs of a growing number of people, and a growing number of new theories and speculations about both our past and our future.

Janet Sitchin, Zechariah's niece, who worked with her uncle for some years before his death in

2010, has performed a service for his adherents and detractors both. In this book, she offers a selection of Sitchin's published and unpublished articles, and extracts from some of his books, which lays out his basic ideas in an easily digestible form.

The reader gets a clear picture of how he came to believe that an alien race had engineered human history and culture, and the progression to his grand narrative about the Annunaki, Nibiru, and the pivotal position of Sumerian culture in the story of humanity.

And there's the rub.

When it's all laid out like this, clearly and unambiguously, one can see at once the flaws in Sitchin's thinking, and recognise the time warp he inhabited. In many respects, this time warp is – or rather, was – shared with orthodox history and archaeology: the fixation on Sumer as the beginning of everything civilised; the crabbed timescale of human development in this respect; the relative ignorance, or downplaying, of older and wider discoveries of human achievement.

Take his listing of Sumer's firsts. He credits them with the first boats; but the people who settled Australia over 20,000 years before the foundation of Sumer didn't swim there. And the ancient people of the Americas, and those who peopled the scattered islands of the Pacific in ancient times, were clearly competent sailors long before the riverine culture of Sumer dared to get its feet wet.

Then there's the origin of agriculture. This has been pushed back beyond Sumer by a series of discoveries in Turkey and further afield (think Göbekli Tepe for instance). Or the origin of textile

"Sitchin is stuck with ascribing everything to Sumer, despite evidence stacking up all around him"

production: there is evidence for woven textiles going back several thousand years before Sumer. Or the beginnings of metal-working: evidence from the Russian Caucasus puts this back to 12,000–13,000 years ago.

The list could go on, but the point is hopefully clear. Having decided that Sumer is the origin of everything, Sitchin is stuck with ascribing everything to Sumer, despite evidence to the contrary stacking up all around him.

The second, and perhaps more amusing, aspect of this time warp (amusing, at least, if you are sceptical of Sitchin's theories) relates to the technology owned and used by his alien overlords. Along with von Däniken, Sitchin sees evidence of spacecraft in the texts and iconography of ancient peoples. But the technology, particularly in the imagery they both select, is the clunky, nuts and bolts stuff of Seventies human space exploration. Our alien betters, with hundreds of thousands of years' head start on us, can only come up with the same crude rocket technology as the inferior humans they have colonised.

When it comes to ray guns and rockets, there's a peculiar irony in Sitchin's treatment of the UFO phenomenon. He was clearly interested in this subject (a whole chapter of this book is devoted to

it) and had no difficulty believing the evidence (however less than empirical that evidence appears to some of us). But the UFO phenomenon was actually rather undermining for his theories. After all, if the Annunaki could visit us at any time using their spacecraft – and the evidence he endorsed clearly suggested that they were doing just that – then why would the ponderous orbital approach of Nibiru be of any importance?

Sitchin's nexus of pivotal moments in history founders on this point. The periodic incursions (every 3,600 years, to match the supposed orbit of the 12th planet) of the Annunaki don't make a whole lot of sense in the light of a supposed facility for space travel. One might also wonder why his identification of the Giza plateau, and the immense megaliths at Baalbek, as parts of a space port for the Annunaki was of any significance if these beings could, and apparently did, land wherever they fancied, whenever the interplanetary whim took them.

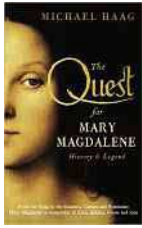
The questions could go on. Who, for instance, witnessed the cosmogonic events that fashioned the Solar System as Sitchin saw it, all those thousands, or perhaps millions, of years ago? Clearly not the inhabitants of any of the planets concerned; they would presumably have died in the massive conflagrations he envisages. Never mind the Sumerians, how did the Annunaki know about it?

Ultimately, one can see Sitchin as simply one of the legion of addled amateur maverick scholars who teem on the margins of an overly orthodox and inflexible

Continued on page 60

The inconvenient Mary

Mary was airbrushed out of Early Church history, traduced as a prostitute and finally given the Dan Brown treatment



The Quest for Mary Magdalene

History and Legend

Michael Haag

Profile Books 2016

Hb, 323pp, illus, further reading, ind, £15.99, ISBN 9781846684524

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.99

In the immediate wake of Dan Brown's publisher-created sensation a decade ago, a lot of books appeared pointing out the many, many problems with it. One of the better ones, packed full of detail and without any Evangelical agenda, was *The Rough Guide to the Da Vinci Code* by Michael and Veronica Haag. Now Michael Haag has returned to one of the central features of *DVC*, Jesus's supposed wife, Mary Magdalene.

He's pretty scathing about Brown's potboiler, and the pseudo-histories from which it appropriated its so-called facts. He finds no evidence for the Magdalene being Jesus's wife, seeing her more as his spiritual rather than physical helpmeet.

Mary Magdalene has for centuries been portrayed as the repentant prostitute, reclining in her cave with a skull to remind us of mortality, and with her long red hair barely covering her charms. Blame Pope Gregory the Great for this; in AD 591 he conflated Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and the sinful woman of Luke 7, and made her sin sexual – an error not overturned by the Catholic Church until the 1960s (though no one noticed).

She features mainly in the accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection – and then, having

been right at the very heart of the story, she's never mentioned again.

Paul says nothing about her in any of his letters; the first person to discover the empty tomb is not even mentioned in his list of resurrection appearances in I Corinthians 15. It's as if she were airbrushed out of the official account of the Early Church, says Haag. She's not mentioned even once in Acts, despite the Early Church seeing her as "the apostle to the apostles". After the first few chapters the focus is entirely on Paul; as someone close to the living Jesus (whom Paul never knew), Mary Magdalene was perhaps an inconvenience to the newly developing religion.

What about her unusual name? Haag disposes of the idea that she was from Magdala; no such place existed in either Old or New Testament times. A fifth-century Byzantine copyist altered "the coasts of Magadan" to "the coasts of Magdala" in Matthew 15, and we've been stuck with the misidentification ever since. In any case she's not called "Mary of Magadan", let alone "Mary of Magdala" in the Gospels, but "Mary the Magdalene" as if it's a title – or, Haag suggests, a nickname given by Jesus, in the same way as Simon being called Peter, the rock, and James and John called Boanerges, sons of thunder. "Magdal" (Aramaic) and "migdal" (Hebrew) mean "tower". Jewish shepherds built towers to oversee their flocks, and fishermen on Galilee had a tower as a lighthouse or beacon – so "Mary the magdal" had "a powerful name" which reflected her helping to protect Jesus's flock and being a beacon, an illuminator. It's speculation, but as likely as any other explanation.

Haag is good on historical background. There were far more Jews outside Palestine than in it, maybe as many as a million in Egypt, with 200,000 in Alexandria

alone. Only about half of the one million population of Palestine were Jewish; the rest were Greeks, Canaanites and others. And far from being uneducated farmers and fishermen, like the rest of the population of the Middle East, many of them were Hellenised, speaking and reading Greek rather than Hebrew. Mary Magdalene was more likely than not to be a Hellenised Jew, Haag argues: middle-class, cultured and a woman of means. She was usually the first-named of the group of women who travelled around with Jesus and the disciples, providing for them financially.

Mary Magdalene's supposed relics (like those of many others) have a tangled history. *The Golden Legend* says she was put in a boat without rudder or sail, and ended up on the south coast of France, at Marseille – or was it Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer? After converting the governor of the province and building some churches, she retired to her cave in the wilderness for the next 30-odd years. She was buried by St Maximin at Aix-en-Provence – only to be dug up and taken off to grace the abbey at Vezelay in Burgundy in AD 769 – or was she? Because by 1279 she'd reappeared in the church at St Maximin-la-Ste-Baume, some 25 miles from Aix – albeit a different St Maximin...

The Quest for Mary Magdalene wanders off into speculation in places, but on the whole it's a well-researched and well-argued exploration of the myth of the Magdalene. As a bonus, the book is beautifully illustrated throughout with artwork from ancient to modern, though unfortunately only the Kindle edition has colour.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

MARY MAGDALENE: A PROSTITUTE, OR A TOWER OF STRENGTH?

8

Continued from previous page

academic world; but one who got lucky in the lottery of fame and rose to prominence, the first among a curious coterie of autodidacts, malcontents and dreamers. If he continues to be a guru for the gullible, more power to his ascended elbow, and more fool them.

Noel Rooney

Fortean Times Verdict

ONE FOR THE ANCIENT ALIEN BELIEVERS AND SCOFFERS ALIKE

6

The Murder of William of Norwich

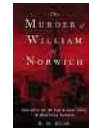
The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe

E M Rose

Oxford University Press 2015

Hb, 394pp, illus, maps, bib, ind, £16.99 ISBN 9780190219628

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99



Allegations that Jewish communities engaged in ritual murder of Christian children were common, or at least

not rare, in the Middle Ages. The victims of these supposed crimes were regarded as martyrs of the Christian faith, and the killings were seen as indictments not of individual criminals but of Jews as a people. The image appears in *The Canterbury Tales* and other mediaeval sources – but where did it come from? In *The Murder of William of Norwich*, E M Rose investigates the earliest known example of this story, the reported killing of a young apprentice in the 1140s. The story of William of Norwich is fascinatingly different from what one might expect: rather than an expression of popular anti-Semitism, the story seems to arise in connection with a homicide case in which a Norwich knight was accused of the murder of a Jewish banker. Bishop William Turbe appears to have deployed the accusation that the Jewish community was collectively responsible for young William's murder to muddy the issue and prevent the crown from prosecuting. His ploy was successful, but the young saint's cult attracted few notable patrons and does not appear to have received much devotion outside Norwich. But the ritual sacrifice

motif reappeared both elsewhere in England and on the Continent within a few decades. About half the book is devoted to the Norwich case, including the creation of *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich* and the (largely unsuccessful) attempt by the monks of the cathedral priory to gain support for their cult. The second half focuses on examples of the blood libel elsewhere in England and Europe.

Rose examines these incidents to discover the social and political role the story played, concluding that, far from being outbreaks of violence by prejudiced mediæval people (although anti-Semitism was widespread), allegations of ritual murder were political acts connected to religious and secular elites. Abbots, counts and even the king of France all used the ritual murder story and its attendant saintly cults to achieve political objectives including enhancing their status, defending legal privileges and even funding public works programmes.

The gaps in the evidence mean that Rose's interpretation is always based on fragments; even the name used for the victim in the 1140s murder case is speculative, though based on reconstruction from the textual evidence. However, even if a few details are uncertain, the overall picture that emerges is clear.

Rose provides extensive information on the historical setting of the cult of William of Norwich, including the politics of England in the 12th century and the disastrous financial and political effects of the failed Second Crusade. This makes *The Murder of William of Norwich* accessible to readers without much background in mediæval history, though some knowledge of the medieval church will be useful. It is an engrossing look not only at the mediæval origin of one of Europe's oldest and most notorious conspiracy theories but also at the ways in which that story has been reused and repurposed in different contexts.

James Holloway

Fortean Times Verdict

THE ORIGINS OF A CONSPIRACY THEORY IN ITS MEDIÆVAL CONTEXT **9**

Secret Tunnels of England

Folklore and Fact

Antony Clayton

Accumulator Press 2016

Hb, 296pp, illus, notes, ind, bib, £22.00, ISBN 0957233418

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £19.50



So many old pubs and religious buildings are 'said to be' connected by secret underground tunnels that, if all the claims were true, our sceptred isle would resemble a Swiss cheese. Despite their alleged use by smugglers, and by randy monks in search of nuns, it seems that most 'tunnels' had a more prosaic purpose and more often than not, they were actually drains or sewers.

Still, the English are never wont to let the truth get in the way of a good story.

Antony Clayton's latest book does feature some actual tunnels, but that's not the point – in England they are far outnumbered by imaginary ones that are often more interesting. 'Lost' secret tunnels abound in English folklore but being lost (and secret) their exact locations are rather vague. On investigation, accounts tend to originate from an unknown source – someone who happened to glimpse the secret tunnel 'during building work, many years ago'. Such tales may be authenticated by a connection to some well-known historical figure, who, like Dick Turpin or Robin Hood, may themselves turn out to be semi-mythical.

Illustrated and highly readable, *Secret Tunnels of England* ends with an afterword by *Fortean Times*'s Gary Lachman on why we are so fascinated by secret tunnels and other subterranean spaces. Citing Plato, Jung and David Lewis-Williams, he considers the psychological and religious aspects of tunnels, bringing the book to a satisfying conclusion.

Tunnels undoubtedly do exist but digging them, especially through rock, is difficult, time-consuming and expensive.

Steve Marshall

Fortean Times Verdict

THE APPEAL OF THE MYSTERIOUS SUBTERRANEAN EXPOSED **8**

Old seafarers

Prehistoric water travel is re-evaluated in this interesting, if flawed, study



Argonauts of the Stone Age

Early Maritime Activity from the First Migrations From Africa to the End of the Neolithic

Andrezej Pydyn

Archeopress Publishing 2016

Pb, 253pp, illus. £36.00 ISBN 978178491143 0

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £31.00

Until recently, the seafaring abilities of Stone Age people were considered almost non-existent, despite evidence of early humans in places reachable only by water. Archaeologists have largely overlooked prehistoric water travel, which begins one to two million years ago with *Homo ergaster* and *Homo erectus*. Andrezej Pydyn wrings the evidence for their stupendous accomplishments from published research on the material remains of water craft and equipment, rock art, genetics, ceramic art, trade networks and climatic data to chart the methods – if not always the motivations – of intrepid ancient nomads.

With the first significant sea-voyages across the Straits of Gibraltar and the Strait of Bab-el-Mandab, and the island colonisations in the Mediterranean, came the "issue

of the perception of the world and a need for self-identification in that world". There was commerce in precious obsidian, flint, animals and – eventually – metals. Western European evidence fronts the discussion era-by-era.

Pydyn analyses all sides of the question of the first migrations to North America, even the most controversial (the Solutreans got there first). He is weaker when examining the supplementary evidence from southeast Asia and drawing intercultural inferences from it. He does not mention Stephen Oppenheimer's research in *Eden in the East*, nor recent anthropological discoveries about Australian aboriginal memory. The biggest omission, though, may be in North Africa. The painted image of a ship with a rudder, oar, and cabin from 9,000 years ago is not examined in terms of the Green Sahara Era, a period when inland navigators may have used similar vessels on colossal waters such as Lake Megachad, which at that time was comparable in area to the Caspian Sea.

The dawn of longships is illustrated with colour images of petroglyphs from Fennoscandia, and ceramics from Africa and the Cycladic Mediterranean. Pydyn discusses voyages and intercultural contacts during the megalithic era. A cogent view of the race to roam the coastlines.

Jerry Glover

Fortean Times Verdict

SET COURSE FOR UNCHARTED WATERS IN MARINE HISTORY

9

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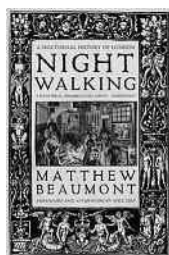
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A dark capital

The Devil – the first flâneur, for some writers – inhabits night-time London



Nightwalking

A Nocturnal History of London

Matthew Beaumont

Verso 2015

Hb, 496pp, illus, notes, ind, £9.99, ISBN 78178483785

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.49

Certain categories seem so stable that it takes in-depth study to understand them. The Sun rises and it's daytime; it sets, and it is night. In *Nightwalking: A Nocturnal History of London*, Mathew Beaumont shows that these categories are far from straightforward.

What becomes clear throughout the whole of Beaumont's excellent book is how night, often perceived as lawless, is wrapped in a legal framework that made it far more legislated and restricted than any other time of day for most of the late- and post-medieval periods.

He discusses how night-walking and walking at night are perceived as distinct from street-walking, and traces how these terms manifest in law and literature. There are themes which still echo now, such as the 'othering' of homeless people and the suspicion that anyone out at night is up to no good. (Unless they were wealthy; members of aristocracy such as Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, felt the night allowed them to commit acts of vandalism.)

In studying walking at night Beaumont looks at the changing perception of light as bringing the civil to the nighttime streets, or enabling acts of darkness.

There are some fortean themes

within the book. The Devil appears when Beaumont explores William Sharpe's idea that Satan was the first flâneur. This concept is taken up by writers such as Thomas Dekker, and Beaumont goes into great detail in writing about night-walking about how the Devil is perceived. This may be of particular interest to those wanting to put Spring-heeled Jack and other such legends in a wider context.

Beaumont also talks in depth about the link between night-walking and conspiracies, looking at the work of both Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, which again provides a well-researched historical context for those who want to better understand the link between walking at night and conspiratorial behaviour.

Where Beaumont really comes into his own is in discussing the way writers and artists such as Blake, De Quincey and Dickens had such a close relationship with night-walking. As an aside Beaumont also shows that throughout the centuries there has also been a close link between writing and homelessness, whether temporary or as a more permanent state.

The book has a focus on London, as the title makes clear, though it does venture out of the city on occasion, whether to look at how Wordsworth used night-walking in Cumbria, or John Clare's heart-breaking 100-mile journey from the Matthew Allen's asylum for the insane to his home in Northborough.

For those interested in perceptions of the city night, psychogeography, or the way we tell stories about what happens in the darkness, and how those change over time, this is an excellent book.

Steve Toase

Fortean Times Verdict

THE PSYCHOGEOGRAPHY OF THE CAPITAL UNDER TORCHLIGHT

8

The Creeping Garden

Irrational Encounters with Plasmodial Slime Moulds

Jasper Sharp & Tim Grabham

Alchimia Books 2015

Hb, 192pp, illus, ind, £16.99, ISBN 9781903254783

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99



In May 1973, a "white and foamy looking" blob "about the size of an oatmeal cookie" appeared in Marie Harris's backyard in Garland, Dallas. Over the next fortnight, the blob grew "to the size of 16 oatmeal cookies" and resisted attempts at destruction. Puncturing the blob, for instance, just released a red, purplish goo.

Locals linked the blob to the famous, at least among ufologists, Aurora incident. In April 1897, apparently, a spaceship exploded leaving a body. Although "badly disfigured", the corpse was considered "not an inhabitant of this world" and was supposedly buried in a graveyard some 75 miles northwest from Garland. Sadly, for ufology, the Garland blob turned out to be a slime mould called *Fuligo septica*.

Slime moulds are not the most appealing organisms: you can't imagine posts of slime moulds replacing cute cats on social media.

Two common names for *F. septica* – the Dog Vomit or Scrambled Egg slime mould – give a fairly accurate impression of its appearance. Yet as *The Creeping Garden* demonstrates, slime moulds are fascinating. They're not plants, fungi or beast – although for decades, biologists misclassified the 1,000 or so species of slime moulds as fungi. They move in search of food, their slime trails acting as a form of memory.

They may even show 'goal-directed behaviour' that some researchers regard as akin to intelligence.

Normally, the cells that make up a slime mould are separate and invisible, foraging on plant material. (There's stunning time-lapse film showing the mould's movement hunting for food on YouTube.) But they can coalesce forming a single large

bag of cytoplasm with several thousand nuclei. So, slime moulds are attracting considerable interest from researchers eager to understand intracellular processes and develop biological computers.

Slime moulds can solve the shortest path problem, for example, connecting a number of points with a minimal tree – such as linking cities by roads or a railway system. You can model the points with flakes of oat on agar. Researchers also developed the Phi-bot, a six-legged platform controlled by *Physarum polycephalum*. Again, there's examples on YouTube.

The Creeping Garden is the book of a documentary (www.creepinggarden.com/), which, based on the trailer, I'm now desperate to see. As you might expect from film-makers, *The Creeping Garden* is beautifully illustrated: the photographs of fungi and moulds are stunning (although I would have found a scale useful on many of the close-ups). But the book works well on its own. There's a wealth of background material, including a neat summary of films starring slime moulds, such as *Magic Myxies*, made by British Instructional Films in 1931 (on YouTube), and Genichiro Higuchi's *The Life History of True Slime Molds* (1997).

Indeed, the Japanese embraced slime moulds. Emperor Hirohito was the uncredited author of *Myxomycetes of the Nasu District* (1935), Japan's first book on slime moulds. Initially, Hirotaro Hattori (of the National Biological Research Institute) was credited as author. But the Emperor collected species around his summer palace and "in 1964 it came to light that the real author was Hirohito". Indeed, as Sharp and Grabham note, Japan has "provided a wellspring of slime mould-related research". And *The Creeping Garden* does a brilliant job of accessibly summarising the wealth of research and offers fascinating insights into this neglected group of organisms.

Mark Greener

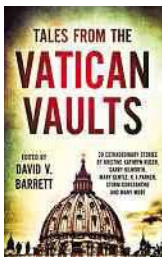
Fortean Times Verdict

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED, ESPECIALLY FOR SLIME FANS

9

Reimagining the papacy

Extraterrestrials as improved messiahs, ghostly castrati, the island of lost priests and a door to other universes – it's Catholicism, but not as we generally know it



Tales from the Vatican Vaults

28 extraordinary stories by Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Garry Kilworth, Mary Gentle, KJ Parker, Storm Constantine and many more

Ed. David V Barrett

Robinson 2015

Pb, 561pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781472111654

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.49

Pope John Paul, instead of dying 33 days into his papacy, lived on to past 98, becoming the longest reigning Pope. He was also the most liberal. He threw open the secret archives of the Vatican Library. There were some strange and terrible things there.

That's the alluring premise of this collection of 28 short stories – each purporting to be based on documents from the vaults.

The stories are of very variable length and quality, but together make a happily intoxicating read. The book's a merry ragbag of weirdnesses. A nun, disguised as a monk, is elected Pope, and gives birth to a child on the Papal litter. Pope Benedict IX's legendary depravity is explained: the electing cardinals were won round by the eloquence of a devil. Since martyrdom is the highest Christian calling, you have to have killers, he said: both martyrs and their murderers are doing God's work. God's Kingdom is best served by a weak, vicious, schismatic Church.

A time-travelling historian is responsible for writing *La Chanson de Roland*, and a monk,

hallucinating or visited by aliens, concludes that his experiences are demonic, notes their similarity to those of Hildegard of Bingen, and seeks to warn the Church against being taken in by her.

Eleanor of Aquitaine's Court of Love in Poitiers was not, we learn, just a school for the poetry of courtly love, but an academy for sex-magic, with its orgasmic energy used to power Eleanor's own political machine. For a group of gnostics, hunted by the Inquisition, and celebrating their embodiment in sexual acts proscribed by the Church, entwined bodies lead to quantum entanglement.

In the Doge's Palace in Venice there are portraits of all the Doges – bar one, Marino Faliero. He's represented by a black shroud. We've all assumed that this is because he attempted a *coup d'état*. But no: it's because he meddled in Chinese sorcery, becoming possessed by the spirit of the Dragon King.

A young Spanish priest almost learns the skill of perfect foresight from a tortured Inca holy man, and the English occultist John Dee discovers the secrets of the gifts brought by the Magi. The myrrh had a use that called into question the resurrection of Jesus.

If you received consecrated bread from a particular Catholic priest, you couldn't tell a lie. That was dangerous in the paranoid England of Elizabeth I.

An astronomer is rescued from the *auto da fé* by aliens, and ships full of witches and wizards head across the Atlantic from England, seeding a magical dynasty amongst the Puritan colonists. Captain Cook is initiated into the cult of a Hawaiian god, and a voodoo ritual summons a storm, turning the tide of US and British history.

What was the Church worried that a prophetic metal monkey

might say? And why, wondered Constantine I, were shepherds so central to the new religion of Christianity?

Pope Pius IX changes his mind about revolution, after angels give him a glimpse of Marxist dystopia, Jack the Ripper turns out to be a young Catholic priest, and Templars, fleeing Cathar Languedoc with the ancient treasures of power, sail along Viking sea roads to an island off Nova Scotia, where they build a booby-trapped shaft to hid the artefacts. But not just artefacts. There's a being down there. And you can stop speculating about the wealth of Rennes-le-Chateau: it came from the true Grail – the Cornucopia of the ancients – which multiplied whatever was put into it.

In the First World War, with shells bursting all around a Belgian village, a soldier hands a mysterious book to a child. Its title: *De Wil* (The Will). The contents of the book change every day. It is God's plan for the world – blank when viewed by the un-called.

A nun in a North Yorkshire convent learns that the snake of Eden is essential for the health of the garden, and an ancient hermetic order of women, based on an unorthodox reading of the Eden story, works in occupied Europe to assassinate high-ranking Nazis.

Pope Pius XII learns of extraterrestrial beings who would, their envoy asserts, make better messiahs than Jesus, and in a small Welsh village a girl has visitations from a saint unknown to the Christian calendar. The girl is responsible for many healings, but causes a Vatican investigator to question the boundary between miracle and magic.

Salvador Dali comes across a

portal, through which beings of light enter the world, and depicts it in his painting of Perpignan station, and the ghost of a mysterious castrato haunts every performance of the original Allegri Miserere, secretly transcribed by Mozart.

There's an Island of Lost Priests, somewhere in the Mediterranean, to which child-abusing priests are exiled, and a manuscript, written by Simon Magus, outlines the multiverse theory. Deep inside the Vatican Vaults is a door to other Universes.

It's all great fun – of the sort that rightly sells the *Fortean Times*. But it's worth asking why it's fun.

We assume that big Christian institutions are far more concerned about their own power and the preservation of their own precious doctrines than about the truth (which certainly seems to be the case with US Conservative Evangelicalism), and we're gleeful when truth trumps power.

That's ethically heartening.

But, more interestingly, we have an immense and curious appetite for counterfactuals, and we think that nothing is quite as it seems.

We're never quite at home in the world. Reality lies

beyond it. 'It's all in Plato', as CS Lewis would have said.

Charles Foster

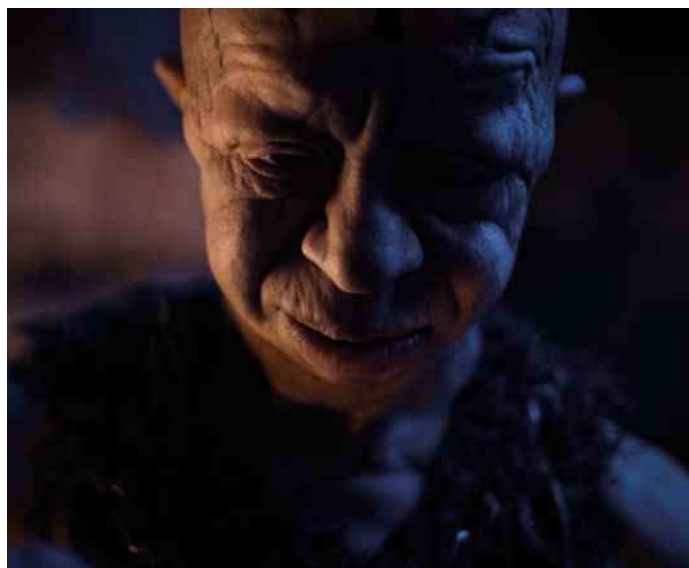


Fortean Times Verdict

THE LATE POPE GETS THE FULL COUNTERFACTUAL TREATMENT

9

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FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD.



Baskin

Dir Can Evrenol, Turkey 2015

On UK release and View on Demand from 15 July

My knowledge of Turkish cinema is pitifully limited, encompassing little more than some hokey *Star Wars* and *Superman* rip-offs (the latter of which is particularly memorable for having been directed by the fantastically named Kunt Tulgar), so the prospect of an introduction to contemporary Turkish horror was an enticing one.

Five boorish coppers (Arda, Remzi, Yavuz, Apo and Seyfi) have knocked off for the night and are having a late snack at a grubby diner, seemingly in the middle of nowhere. They swap ribald tales, work out their football betting coupon, and argue amongst themselves. Out back, unseen by the cops, a mysterious hooded figure hands a bag of raw meat to the cook.

Back in the diner, Yavuz (Muharrem Bayrak), the aggressive one with the hair-trigger temper, provokes a fight with the waiter and despite the intervention of the lad's father – the proprietor – beats him up. Remzi (Ergun Kuyuc), the chief, ushers his men outside and into the police van to take every-one home. En route, they receive a call requesting urgent back-up at an incident nearby. From this point on, events take a bizarre, not to say terrifying, turn.

As it turns out, Turkish horror cinema is much the same as horror cinema in the rest of the world. Admittedly, subtleties may be lost in translation but so much of

Baskin is familiar that you can't help but wonder whether director Can Evrenol is making a deliberate play to show the English-speaking film industry what he can do. The opening sequence in the diner has got Tarantino written all over it and the imagery too is familiar from umpteen other films you will no doubt have seen before; some, it has to be said, from quite some time ago. You know the kind of thing I mean: an abandoned old building inexplicably overflowing with clanking chains, plastic sheeting, disgusting toilets, and so on. Even the plot devices – the van hits something on the road, causing a crash, but there's no trace of a body and our heroes are now stranded – are as old as the hills. The nadir/zenith of this, depending on how you look at it, is the final sequence, which is not so much old hat as a primitive cap made of woolly mammoth fur. There's even the obligatory industrial heavy metal over the end credits.

The characters are not fleshed out beyond their sole defining traits: so, aside from the aforementioned Remzi and Yuvan, we have the rookie Arda and the nervy Seyfi. The fifth copper, Apo, doesn't even get that much development – I didn't even catch what his name is until he was having his lower intestine pulled out through his stomach. Perhaps to compensate for this, the narrative jumps backwards and forwards in time like nobody's business, which ingeniously makes everything much more head-scratching than it really is.

Yet amid all the familiar tropes there are flashes of imagination and skill. Evrenol's use of colour is superb, with stabs of bright red or yellow illuminating a scene in much the same way as the great Mario Bava used to do. Great care has clearly been taken with the production design, so that although the action and locations may be routine, the details within the frame are always interesting.

I don't think it's revealing too much to say that we eventually learn the coppers are up against Devil worshippers – and a particularly revolting bunch they are too, a world away from the relatively normal types found in US fare like *Rosemary's Baby* or *Ride with the Devil*. In fact, they seem to be barely human at all – which goes double for the leader of their weird sect. This character, the Father (the remarkable Mehmet Cerrahoglu), is the film's trump card. A genuinely original creation, he is at once repulsive and compelling, dispensing his horrific violence with soft, kind words – almost tenderly.

It's a shame, then, that despite these intriguing new elements the second half of the film doesn't rise much above stylish torture porn with a diabolic twist. In most run-of-the-mill horror films the characters are one-dimensional because their sole purpose is to be bumped off by The Baddie; that's just what's going on here, and no amount of technical ingenuity, or occasional moments of sheer bad taste, can disguise it. However, while you'll have seen guys and gals stumbling on to, and being diced by, vicious cultists a billion times over, you'll almost certainly never have seen it happen to Turkish coppers; so, if for no other reason, you should find the time to give this a go.

Daniel King

Fortean Times Verdict

TURKISH HORROR IS
DERIVATIVE BUT INTERESTING

7

K-Shop

Dir Dan Pringle, UK 2016

On UK release from 22 June

K-Shop comes across initially as a tale about the values of a minority ethnic culture's colliding with the drunken, right-wing belligerence of little Englanders, but it turns out to be more – and more fun – than that.

When university student Salah

(a strong, well-measured performance from Ziad Abaza) returns to his family's kebab shop in an unnamed seaside town, the place is in bad shape. Spurred on by a desire to avenge his father, who was mugged and left for dead, Salah reopens the takeaway and sets out to clear its debts. This decision exposes the mild-mannered student to the worst of British culture: a steady stream of binge-drinking youths and foul-mouthed, drunken clubbers pours through the shop every night at closing time. Finally, the onslaught leads to disaster when a patron accidentally stumbles into the deep fat fryer, leaving Salah with a corpse to dispose off. Well... this is a kebab shop.

Soon, the minced remains of drunken revellers are mixed with meat and devoured with relish by the intoxicated public in search of a drink, a dance and a late-night kebab. Salah's Sweeney Todd inspired vengeance soon attracts the attention of a former Big Brother celebrity turned nightclub entrepreneur and the story works it way towards a conclusion that if not surprising is undeniably satisfying.

The film mines both revulsion – there's accomplished effects work as human limbs are butchered – and laughter, as when two drunks agree that this is the best kebab they've ever tasted. It's a horror film, but mixes serial killing, social commentary, black comedy and vigilante thriller elements to good effect. Perhaps none of the targets are new – celebrity and substance abuse have been explored many times before – but director Dan Pringle gives them his own spin, as well as clever stylistic support through documentary style-footage and Chris Ferguson's camerawork and lighting.

K-Shop is not without faults – the female lead's story fails to engage and budget limitations are evident throughout – but these are easily forgiven when the result is a modest, well-crafted first movie from White Lantern Films. In an age of soaring cinema ticket prices and expensive blockbusters that leave you feeling robbed of the admission price, that's no mean feat.

Mark McConnell

Fortean Times Verdict

SURPRISINGLY GOOD TALE OF
A MODERN-DAY SWEENEY TODD

7

Pride & Prejudice & Zombies

Dir Burr Steer, UK 2015

Lionsgate Home Entertainment, £14.99 (Blu-ray) £12.99 (DVD)

One thing you can say about *Pride & Prejudice & Zombies*: it does exactly what it says on the tin. This mash-up of two perennial favourites – Jane Austen and the walking dead – is the brainchild of Quirk Books editor Jason Rekulak, based on Seth Grahame-Smith's novel of the same name, and is brought to the screen by writer and director Burr Steer.

A strange plague has befallen 19th century England: while feisty young ladies trail muddy petticoats everywhere, the land is overrun by the undead. Elizabeth Bennett (Lily James) and her sisters are no ordinary girls, though – for them, finishing school was a trip to China to learn martial arts and weaponry – and Darcy is a dashing zombie slayer roving around any country home that reports even a sniff of infection. Despite decorous and stiff-upper-lip appearances, England is on the brink of oblivion and the walled city of London is the last refuge of un-suited young ladies everywhere. Will Elizabeth and Darcy manage to escape the flesh-eating monsters and a dastardly Wickham and find true love?

There's an impressive cast that includes Charles Dance, Matt Smith and *Game of Thrones*'s Cersei herself, Lena Headey, as England's one-eyed premier zombie killer; she's more Wicked Lady than Lady Catherine de Bourgh and wasted, to be honest. The scenes that most closely resemble the iconic moments of Jane Austen's original prove to be the most successful and amusing. Yes, it's a one-joke film, but thanks to the quality of the actors it manages not to pall. It's the confrontation with the zombies themselves (who don't get enough screen time) that disappoints. Irreverent and outrageous as a premise, *Pride & Prejudice & Zombies* is amusingly reverential to the Austen source material but not nearly outrageous enough when it comes to the bloodletting.

Nick Cirkovic

Fortean Times Verdict

NOT ENOUGH BLOOD ON THE DRAWING ROOM FLOOR

6

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

This month, FT's resident man of the cloth **REVEREND PETER LAWS** dons his dog collar and rounds up a slew of recommended books on horror cinema.

BLOOD BATH

Prod Roger Corman, US 1963-1966

Arrow Video, £19.99 (Blu-ray)

I reckon the people who make dictionaries should replace the entry for 'convoluted' with a poster of *Blood Bath* instead, because the production history of this Roger Corman movie is as twisty and tangled as a set of Wilko Christmas lights. Ready for it? Good... now pay attention...

In 1963, Corman helped finance an as-yet unproduced Yugoslavian film called *Operation Titian*. He even got young upstart Francis Ford Coppola to oversee production. When Corman saw it, however, he balked. The plodding black and white crime thriller-cum-travel documentary was basically unreleasable. Corman recut and re-scored the film and called it *Portrait in Terror*. Yet it still lacked that lucrative drive-in vibe he was looking for. So in 1964 he had a third shot, asking *Spider Baby* director Jack Hill to beef up the horror. *Blood Bath* was born... yet Corman still wasn't convinced. He called in Stephanie Rothman to make a fourth version. This one retained the title *Blood Bath* (because who could ever ditch a name like that) but it added a vampire

plot for good measure. And what do you know? This one actually got released in 1966. That's four versions so far... But wait – there's more. A heftily-padded TV edit came out later called *Track of the Vampire* and rounded off one of the most tortured and tortuous stop-start productions in horror movie history.

Now, the wonderfully OCD folks at Arrow Video have released four of the five versions on Blu-ray; which means you can watch a patchy art thriller gradually evolve into a movie about a jittery vampire artist killing women and turning them into wax dummies. Plus, it'll only take you about five hours to complete the journey!

Frankly, what went on behind the camera is a lot more fascinating than what happens in front of it. So a real gem in this set is the feature-length video essay by Tim Lucas in which he unpacks the wild history of the film. That said, the movies do have their own charm. Trek through each planet in the *Blood Bath* universe and you'll find the vivid, Orson Welles-style cinematography of *Titian*, the straight-up Sixties gore and beatnik art commentary of Hill's *Blood Bath* and the hilarious, pointless padding



of the TV version, which is what really tickled me. Seriously, *Track of the Vampire* has a mortally tedious scene of a woman being chased on the beach. It lasts for... take this in... eight whole minutes! Which is just about long enough to break on through to the other side of boredom and enter the realm of general hilarity. Oh, and kudos to Stephanie Rothman. She decided the artist character should morph into a completely different guy whenever he turned vampiric, meaning the previous (more expensive) actor didn't have to be re-hired. Genius!

Fortean Times Verdict

CORMAN FOR COMPLETISTS IN THIS DEFINITIVE RELEASE

6



Doomwatch

Created by Kit Pedler and Gerry Davis, UK 1970-72

Simply Media, £39.99 (DVD)

In the early Seventies there was a sudden interest in man's impact on the world: books on pollution, overpopulation, chemical dangers, dust-bowls, and energy sources adorned student shelves. And in 1970-72, for anyone with a burgeoning concern for the environment, there was *Doomwatch*, a BBC series about the moral responsibility of scientists. It was the brainchild of scientist Dr Kit Pedler and Gerry Davis, who had worked together on *Doctor Who*, creating the Cybermen; they later rewrote their opening *Doomwatch* episode "The Plastic Eaters" as a novel.

'Doomwatch' was the nickname for a tiny Government department, fewer than half a dozen people headed up by Nobel laureate Dr Spencer Quist (John Paul). The Department for the Observation and Measurement of Scientific Work monitored the effects of scientific and technological developments. In 37 episodes over three series (the final episode of series three was never made), we watched Quist and his team of "expert nuisances" battling against stubborn bureaucrats, scientists who hadn't thought through the implications of their inventions, and technocrats who didn't care. It was a brilliant series, with many truly terrifying (but nearly always realistic) storylines.

Working with Quist were former intelligence agent Dr John Ridge (Simon Oates), who was never averse to bending the law; his cavalier attitude to young women, including the office secretary, dates the series more than anything on the scientific side, including the (incredibly primitive) computer worked by Colin Bradley (Joby Blanshard) who, with his lab coat, stolid personality and heavy Yorkshire accent was a useful foil to the other more vibrant characters.

After broadcast, the BBC re-used the tapes. Canadian sources mean that all of series two exists, but only about half of series one, and only three episodes from the final series: 24 in all. For years, only a couple of episodes have been officially available on video, let alone DVD. Now, at last, they're all officially released in a seven-DVD set – including one episode, "Sex and Violence", that was never broadcast because of com-

plaints by Mary Whitehouse (who is beautifully satirised in it) and others, and because it shows film of a real execution in Nigeria. The picture quality is a bit dodgy, but not enough to spoil enjoyment of the series.

Some storylines, like the carnivorous intelligent rats, were perhaps a little unlikely – but *Doomwatch* covered very real issues like the effects on people of lead in petrol – an episode that met with huge resistance from oil companies; the absorption of female hormones from fish farming; the evacuation of a village following a deadly germ leak; what to do with the population of an isolated island when they're moved en masse to Britain; letting computers decide the treatment of the seriously ill; the perils of computerised security, of pesticides, of drugs that haven't been fully tested, of chemical leaks from factories; and much more.

When you see Powell and Oates in the half-hour BBC4 documentary "The Cult of Doomwatch" (2006) on the final disc you suddenly realise just how many decades it is since *Doomwatch* was made. It's dated in its production, its acting, its long scenes and speeches, its fluffed lines (retakes were expensive), its attitudes towards women, and perhaps most of all its fashions (Quist's polo neck shirts, Ridge's cravats) – yet it's still fresh and powerful today.

Doomwatch was one of the most significant and most powerful TV dramas of the last 50 years – a fact that is ignored in this box set. The BBC4 documentary is the sole extra; there's no booklet of essays and no cast or episode guides, and the subtitles appear to have been written by someone who not only wasn't paying any attention to the stories, but quite possibly doesn't even speak English. "The Min of Ag & Fish" becomes "The men of Agnum Fish"; "Oh, ta love" becomes "Oh Tarla", and so on.

There's a feeling throughout *Doomwatch* that they're holding back the tide, only delaying the inevitable. Forty-plus years on, we can reflect on Quist's words, as relevant today as then: "But so long as human intelligence, human judgement, has the last word..." "And if it doesn't?" "God help us all."

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

POWERFUL AND PROPHETIC
DRAMA IN SHODDY RELEASE

8

SHORTS

DOOMWATCH

Screenbound Pictures, £9.99 (DVD)



The BBC series *Doomwatch* (see David Barrett's review) didn't have Godzilla-like beasts stomping on missile bases but instead explored the more insidious threats of pollution and environmental tinkering. In 1972 it got the big screen treatment, with a movie poster promising "an ecological nightmare gone berserk!" It's set in a small fishing village whose inhabitants are becoming deformed and violent. Is it a classic case of inbreeding... or something else? The eerie first half plays like *The Wicker Man*, but the action soon widens to pull in politics, big business and lots of polo-neck jumpers: it's an absorbing, entertaining window into the twitchy environmental fears of the early 1970s. **Rev Peter Laws 7/10**

THE NINTH CONFIGURATION

Second Sight, £12.99 (Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD)



In *The Exorcist*, William Peter Blatty set out the case for the Devil's existence. In *The Ninth Configuration* (which he wrote, directed and starred in), he offers the argument for that other cosmic figurehead, God. It's a brilliant, left-field movie, with Stacy Keach in superb form as the Army Colonel overseeing an asylum full of troubled veterans and failed astronauts. It's also a reminder of just how funny Blatty can be. In fact, for a while you'll think you're watching a comedy. Come the gut-twisting last third of the movie, though, and you'll be left sobbing like a baby. It's a film that's sure to puzzle and infuriate some, but delight plenty of others. **Rev PL 9/10**

THE BIG SHORT

Paramount Home Entertainment, £14.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)



Adapted from Michael Lewis's non-fiction book of the same name, Adam McKay's film similarly attempts to render the global recession of 2007 comprehensible to those of us who aren't financial wizards. McKay manages to make this cautionary tale of greed, denial and cover-up on a massive scale – and the men who saw it coming – entertaining enough, although I found its fourth-wall breaking and Margot Robbie explaining sub-prime mortgages from a bubble bath stunt glib and slightly patronising. Christian Bale *acts* a lot, but Steve Carell is outstanding at providing some sort of moral centre from which to watch the whole nightmare unfold. **DS 7/10**

SPOTLIGHT

Entertainment One, £14.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)



Focusing on another cover-up dragged into the light of day, *Spotlight* tells the story of how a team of reporters from the *Boston Globe* uncovered the scandal of priests abusing children in their pastoral care while being protected by the city's Catholic establishment. A sober, understated film, this boasts fantastic performances all round, especially from Michael Keaton, Rachel McAdams and Mark Ruffalo (who gets quite angry at one point; Hulk smash puny paedo priests?). Some may find the film's measured pace frustrating, but it does a quietly brilliant job of laying out the patient legwork involved in a piece of long-term investigative journalism. **DS 8/10**

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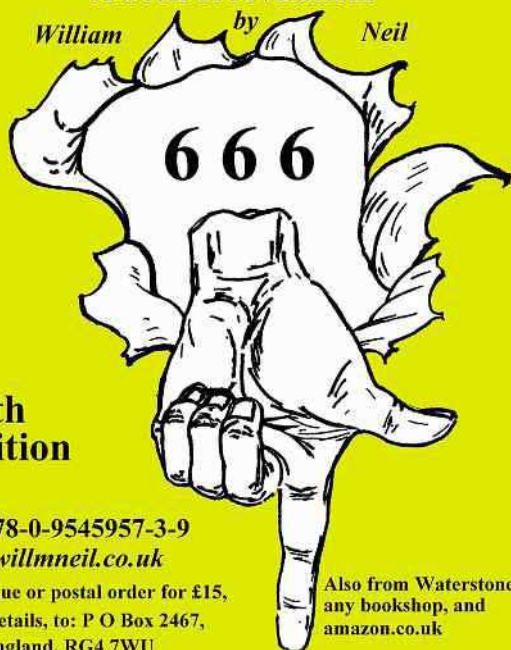
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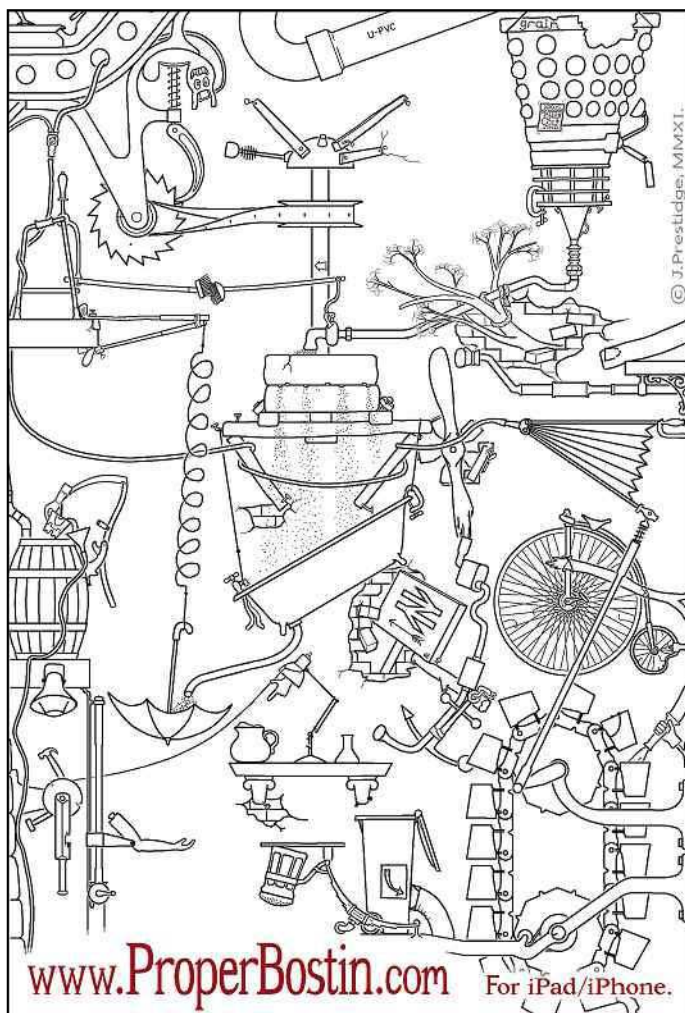
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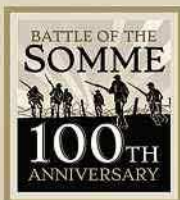
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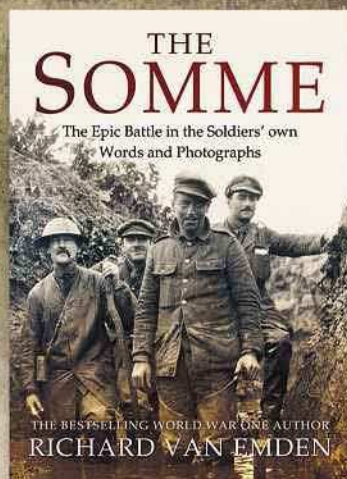
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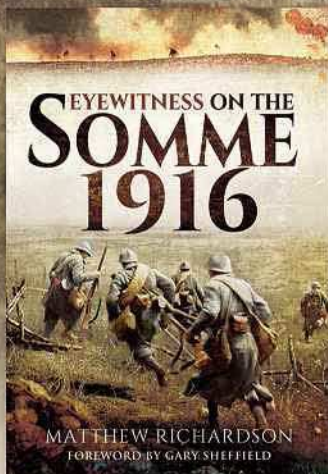
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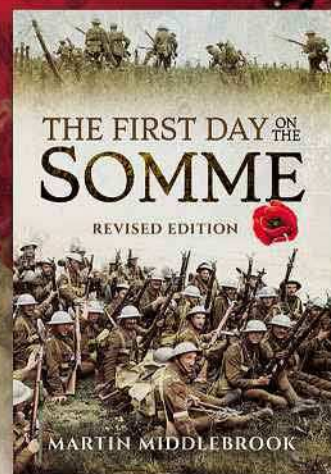
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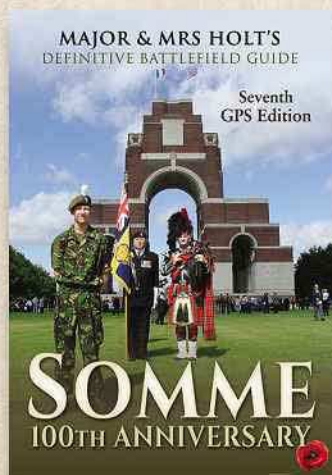
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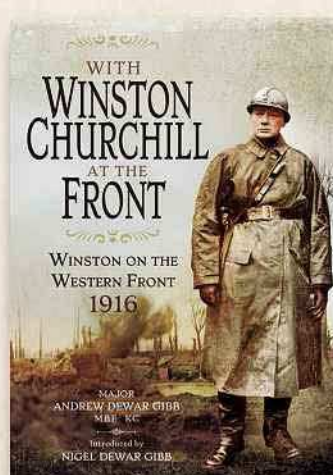
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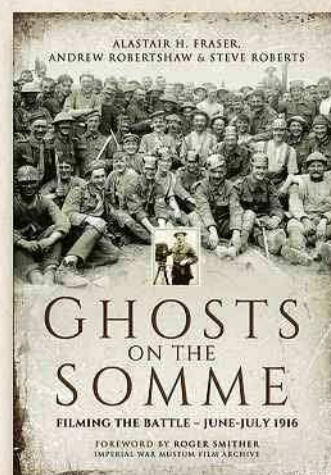
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Dear FT...

letters



Beady-eyed

Alan Murdie is quite correct in saying Galileo may have spied Neptune [FT340:42-45]. The story goes that it was cloudy on the third night of his observation and therefore he couldn't confirm the object had moved against the background of stars. Countless humans must have seen Uranus too since the dawn of humanity, as it is just visible by the naked eye (but often gets omitted from the list of naked eye planets). Perhaps a keen eye thousands of years ago noticed it moving against the stellar background long before Herschel 'discovered' it.

Kevan Hubbard
Oxford

Sceptic strikes gold

A news story today [11 May 2016] concerns a prospector called Vincent Thurkettle finding Britain's largest-ever gold nugget off Moelfre, Anglesey. Thurkettle, 60, discovered the 23-carat nugget, the size of a small chicken's egg and worth £50,000, on the seabed, 16ft (5m) down in 2012, but kept it secret until he was sure there was no more gold on the nearby wreck of the *Royal Charter* that sank during a hurricane in 1859, supposedly with gold worth £120 million. The nugget is now the property of the Crown.

By a curious twist, Thurkettle is the same man who – as a young forer – was involved in the Rendlesham Forest UFO crash case and is best known for supposedly creating the lighthouse explanation.

Jenny Randles
Stockport, Cheshire

Adolf spared

In response to Duncan Kaiser's letter, 'pull the other one' [FT339:74], the Tommy who supposedly spared Adolf Hitler's life was Private Henry Tandey, Britain's most decorated soldier of World War I. The story goes that, whilst visiting Germany in 1938 to secure 'peace in our time', Neville Chamberlain was given a tour of Hitler's apartments. Whilst there, he enquired

Simulacra corner



Catherine Hale noticed this dark apparition in Marks and Spencer's Bedford store, and asked her father Rodney Hale to photograph it. The image, she said, "might be either the result of the way the light hits the side panel of the Breaded Fish shelves, or something more sinister..." *We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them to the PO box above (with a stamped addressed envelope or international reply coupon) or to sieveking@forteantimes.com – and please tell us your postal address.*

after a painting on the wall called *The Menin Crossroads* (1923) by Fortunino Matania. Hitler told Chamberlain that the man in the front of the painting was the by-now famous British war hero Henry Tandey, and then went on to explain that he and Tandey had met on a battlefield in 1918. Supposedly, Hitler had been crossing open ground in a French village, only to look up and find himself staring down the barrel of a Tommy's rifle. A moment passed, and then, perhaps having seen enough blood spilt for one day, the British soldier had lowered his weapon, allowing a grateful Hitler

to nod his thanks and escape. Some months later, he recognised Tandey from a photograph in a newspaper article about his being awarded the Victoria Cross. Armed with a name, the by-then Führer came into possession of the painting in 1937 after a member of his staff, Dr Otto Schwend, alerted him to the fact that Tandey purportedly featured prominently in Matania's painting.

As for the truth of the matter, we know that Hitler did have a copy of *The Menin Crossroads* hanging on his wall, and we know that in 1939 Tandey was interviewed for the *Coventry Herald* in August 1939 and, when asked about the

incident, replied: "According to them, I've met Adolf Hitler. Maybe they're right, but I can't remember him." We know also that, some time after his Coventry home had been flattened by a German bomb, an emotionally charged Tandey told another reporter: "When I saw all the women and children he had killed and wounded I was sorry to God I let him go."

As for the rest of the tale, Dr David Johnson has pointed out (amongst other things) the inconsistencies in Tandey's accounts, the lack of any documentary evidence supporting the conversation between Chamberlain and Hitler, and the lack of any date on which both Tandey and Hitler could have been in the same part of France at the same time. You can read about the full affair in Johnson's book *One Soldier and Hitler: 1918* (2012).

Stefan Putigny
Andover, Hampshire

Grilled teddy bears

I enjoyed reading John Billingsley's article on the use of soft toys as a protective device in the Balkan countries [FT339:28-35], especially the part about the occurrence of soft toys attached to the grills of vehicles in Britain and the America. Whilst I was a student in the late 1980s I worked as a dustbin man (not the correct term nowadays) for the local borough council during the summer holiday. The first year many of the dustbin lorries were adorned with various toys that had been left out in the rubbish, which were repurposed to cheer up the vehicles. On returning the next year I found they had all gone. The men had been told to remove them due to the fear that small children would walk in front of the wagons to look at or try to remove the toys; what's more, there was a story that a child had been killed doing this somewhere in the country. I'm not sure if this was just an excuse for extending Health & Safety or a genuine incident. If the latter, does anyone recall the details?

Darren Fowkes
Ilkeston, Derbyshire

Haf I got news for you

The following report is from the '70 years ago' column of the Norwegian weekly paper *Morgenbladet* (19 Feb 2016), originally published in February 1946.

“PECULIAR LANGUAGE ABERRATION.

In The Norwegian Academy of Sciences Professor Dr. O.H. Monrad-Krohn gave a lecture about a 30-year-old woman who in September 1941 was hit by a bomb splinter on her head. She soon recovered, but when she regained her powers of speech she had completely changed her accent and prosody, so that she was constantly taken for a German, and so was unable to buy anything in shops. She is born in Nordstrand [a suburb of Oslo], lives in Oslo, and has never been abroad.”

[Recounted at FT58:26, 76:14]

This is a strange story in many ways. It is obvious that the medical establishment took the case seriously, so it may well be a genuine example of Foreign Accent Syndrome. On the other hand, many Norwegians were pro-German and many women dated German soldiers, so it might conceivably be an affectation to ‘fit in’ with the Germans. This would of course make her mighty unpopular among patriotic Norwegians, but you had to make your choice in those days. The really unbelievable part is that a German “should be unable to buy anything in shops.” Open rebellion against the occupying forces was extremely

dangerous – you could be jailed, sent to a concentration camp, or shot – so it would be a brave shopkeeper indeed who would turn a German away.

Possibly, the phrase ‘taken for a German’ should be understood as ‘believed to be a Norwegian collaborator’ – patriotic Norwegians would avoid having anything to do with them. That might have been even more dangerous for the shopkeepers; many collaborators would be quicker to take offense than the Germans themselves, who of course understood the situation and knew they were unpopular. To give an example, my mother, born in 1929, was between 11 and 16 years old during WWII. It was a common sport among the children in Trondheim to bait German soldiers and officers, and some of the stories she tells make me literally sick with worry. Still, she never came to any harm.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

Bunker busters

With reference to the Mythchaser suggestion that modern nuclear warheads are so powerful as to render bunkers obsolete [FT340:23], this isn't quite right. The most powerful nuclear bombs ever developed were products of the 1950s and early 1960s. ('Tsar Bomba' was the biggest nuclear detonation in history and that was 1961). Modern nuclear warhead yields are not officially acknowledged, but something of the order of 100-200 Kilotonnes (TNT equivalent) is the likely norm, at least in the West. The early weapons yielded in the Megatonne range and it is hard to envisage any practical bunker design protecting against such a destructive weapon.

A major difference between mid-20th century weapons and their modern equivalents is in the accuracy of their guidance systems. An intercontinental ballistic missile with a 1960s guidance computer would do well to achieve a Circular Error Probable (CEP) of a couple of miles (CEP is the radius within which there is a

50 per cent chance of the missile actually landing, if it is aimed at the centre of a circle of that radius). Surveillance limitations of the time would also make it harder to know exactly where the target was. While even a bunker such as the Cheyenne Mountain complex in Colorado would not survive a direct hit from a strategic warhead, it could survive the blast from one landing a mile or more away, as well as the accompanying Electromagnetic Pulse. This seemed a reasonable level of survivability when the facility was built, but since modern guidance systems would put the warhead on top of the bunker, the protection it now offers is pretty limited.

Realistically, the decommissioning of bunkers since the end of the Cold War is justified by the (supposed) reduction in the threat. It is no doubt correct to say that they had long since ceased to offer the protection they were designed to offer. In any case, the realities of military decision-making are a little more complex than “What could they hit us with?” and “What could protect us?” The enemy's Concept of Operations is also relevant. For example, it would not be politically acceptable for the UK government to have an explicit policy of targeting civilian population centres with nuclear warheads – rather, the UK strategic strike would target Soviet Command and Control facilities. As it happens these were dotted around the edge of Moscow, so a strategic response would have the effect of flattening the city anyway, but not as a result of direct impact on the city itself, so civil defence facilities in the city might offer more protection than if the city itself were the target.

Ian I'Anson
Lancing, West Sussex

There are relevant references to nuclear bunkers in Keith Wallender's excellent books *Underground Manchester* and *Below Manchester* published by Willow Publishing. In the latter volume Wallender makes reference to Guardian, which was part of a network of communications bunkers created after WWII. Similar facilities were Kingsway in London and Anchor in Birmingham. In *Below Manches-*

ter the author states that: “The development of nuclear missiles meant that Guardian had less strategic importance...” whilst I seem to recall a more specific reference in the previous volume to the bunker having been designed to withstand attack by atomic bomb, but being unable to withstand thermonuclear weapons. Although it had been rendered redundant for this reason, the facility was maintained as a telephone exchange.

Andy Pearson
Birchwood, Cheshire

Ether & dark matter

Kurt Lothman asks why dark matter is acceptable to science and ether is not [FT339:73]. The answer is that the ‘Luminiferous Ether’, as it was conceived, had quite specific properties – in particular it was a medium at absolute rest, through which electromagnetic waves were transmitted and other objects moved. The existence of the ether implied certain behaviour that the Michelson Morley experiment demonstrated did not in fact occur (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelson%E2%80%93Morley_experiment). It therefore follows that the ether as conceived up to that point cannot exist.

By contrast, while experimental efforts to directly observe dark matter have thus far failed, no experiment has been able to produce physical evidence that it *cannot* exist. It may not exist, but in that case a whole new theory will be needed to explain the anomalies that dark matter was conceived to account for.

Regarding the Luminiferous Ether, I say ‘as conceived’, because the quantum foam (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quantum_foam and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aether_theories) is at least superficially similar to the concept of the ether, though its properties are fundamentally different. So, in fact, an ether of some description is quite acceptable to modern science; just not one exhibiting the properties that experimental observations have demonstrated that it cannot have.

Ian I'Anson
Lancing, West Sussex



JORDO

The failure of attempts to measure the velocity of the Earth through a postulated 'Luminiferous Æther' led to the formulation of the theory of relativity. The idea of the ether was replaced by the current view of the vacuum as an active medium, boiling with transient virtual particles. Dark matter is postulated to consist of very weakly interacting particles, perhaps only acting on other matter by its gravitational effect. It is needed in order to make galaxies and galactic clusters gravitationally bound: without more mass than can be detected in them, they would break up. Dark matter, whatever it turns out to be, is not uniformly distributed and does not have any of the properties formerly attributed to the ether.

Dr Pete Swindells

Wolverhampton, West Midlands

Wrong woodland

As a long-time fan and subscriber, and a long-time resident of Woodland, California, I was thrilled to see Woodland mentioned [FT340:9]. But alas! It's a mistake. The town that is afraid of solar power is Woodland, North Carolina. Woodland, California, has quite a few solar installations, but still not enough ghosts or UFOs to make the cut in *Fortean Times*, still my favourite magazine.

Mary Aulman

By email

Scoff not

In his review of *Suspicious Minds* [FT339:61], David V Barrett states: "Conspiracists are... less inclined to think logically, rationally and scientifically." I have observed similar traits in so called 'sceptics' – people who you can talk to about seemingly anything who suddenly get angry and contemptuous at the mere suggestion that rich and powerful people sometimes gather in private and plot to increase their wealth and power. One definition of conspiracy is "a secret plan by a group to do something unlawful or harmful". If three hoodlums meet in secret to plot a robbery, it's a conspiracy; thus if a group of ultra-rich bankers clandestinely meet to fix the price of gold, it too is a conspiracy. If one reads the books of either ex US National Security

Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski or ex Harvard history professor Carol Quigley, there is no need to envisage bug-eyed aliens from Zeta Reticuli cavorting around an owl statue with members of an extinct Bavarian secret society.

Speaking of Bavaria, the Nazis began as a small cadre of anti-communists, occultists and ex-army officers who met and plotted in Munich beer halls. It took the combined might of the capitalist and communist powers to wreck their dream of a 1,000-year Reich. Communism too began with a small cadre of men plotting in back rooms and distributing subversive tracts. These men went on to machine-gun the Tsar and his family before lowering the Iron Curtain on Eastern Europe and large swathes of Asia. Christianity began from secret meetings hidden from the eyes of the Romans. From this emerged the Holy Roman Empire, the Inquisition, and the Conquistadors. The prophet Mohammed started off with a small group of followers hunted by powerful tribal

enemies and their descendants went on to form a Caliphate that stretched from Spain and North Africa to the Balkans and the steppes of Russia.

Returning to the reaction of 'sceptics', I would suggest that it is a unique defence mechanism used by the elite. Imagine that you had a mortal enemy and you knew many sordid details about his life, but every time you tried to tell others they reacted as if you were mentally ill or stupid. Since the CIA invented the term 'conspiracy theorist' in the wake of the Warren Commission, the mass media have delighted in portraying conspiracy theorists as imbeciles and loons, and in my experience sceptics are just as credulous as anyone else.

Paul Whyte

Dublin

Hinton Ampner

I recently come across an interesting aspect of the Hinton Ampner mystery [FT309:28-32, 336:74]. In a long out-of-print volume, *Secret*



Mystery key

My seven-year-old daughter, a keen trainee forteen, found this tiny key in an ancient gnarled yew tree at Kingley Vale, East Sussex, on 1 May 2016. It was resting in a gap in a branch of the large yew that she was climbing in a grove of several other trees. The bronze-coloured key is 28mm long. It turned out that

the friends we were with had found a very similar key in the preceding weeks in a different tree in the same grove. My daughter speculated that it might be a fairy key, but could find no appropriately sized door nearby. Have any other readers found similar keys here or elsewhere – or does anyone know their provenance?

Richard Cockshott

Bodmin, Cornwall

Chambers and Hiding Places (SH Bousfield, London, 1901), historian and antiquary Allan Fea includes an account of the destruction of the mansion of Hinton Ampner, which appears to resolve the nature of the 'haunting' that occurred there. I quote the passage in full: "...When it was pulled down in year 1797, it became very obvious how the mysteries, which gave the house the reputation for being haunted, were managed, for numerous secret stairs and passages, not known to exist, were brought to light which had offered peculiar facilities for the deception. About the middle of the eighteenth century the mansion passed out of the hands of its old possessors, the Stewkeleys, and shortly afterwards became notorious for the unaccountable noises which disturbed the peace of mind of the new tenants. Not only were there violent knocks, hammerings, groanings, and the sound of footsteps in the ceilings and walls, strange sights frightened the servants out of their wits. A ghostly visitant dressed in drab would appear and disappear mysteriously, a female figure was often seen to rush through the apartments, and other supernatural occurrences at length became so intolerable that the inmates of the house sought refuge in flight. Later successive tenants fared the same. A hundred pounds reward was offered to any that should run the ghosts to earth; but nothing resulted from it, and after thirty years or more of hauntings, the house was razed to the ground. Secret passages and chambers were then brought to light; but those who had carried on the deception for so long took the secret with them to their graves." (page 85).

Citing the *Life of Richard Barham* (an Anglican priest, antiquary and author of *The Ingoldsby Legends*), this account offers a rational dimension to the occurrences which famously took place at that house and an altogether valuable perspective – that of not taking things at face value. Perhaps the truth behind the disturbing events at Hinton Ampner vanished forever with the fabric of the old building.

Andrew Charles Plantagenet Summers

Chelmarsh, Shropshire

Alien tech

I was looking on-line recently at ancient artefacts resembling space rockets. With the “Istanbul space-ship” (pictured right) championed by Zecharia Sitchin, I was, as ever, impressed by the position of the ‘cabin’ to the fore of the vehicle, the conical nose, the apparent booster rockets so similar to those we actually use ourselves; even the ‘pilot’s’ clothing seemed to resemble a spaceman’s apparel. But then it struck me: if these objects are space vehicles of the sort we recognise as rockets, they would be unable to reach our planet from some distant world unless they used a much more sophisticated technology than we have for our rockets, and if they did use such improved flight techniques would they really resemble our own ‘ordinary’ craft? After all, modern-day sightings, if clear ones, almost invariably concern variations on the saucer-shape craft, triangular vehicles and ‘cigars’, whilst less clear sightings concern tiny ball-like lights. None of which (even ‘cigars’) really resemble rockets.

For some ‘faked’ sightings I propose what I call the *Star Trek* formula: the more sophisticated the vehicle sighted the less likely it is to be real footage. That is, if it looks like it came from the cutting-room floor of a science-fiction movie, then it probably did! One classic sign is the presence of wing-like appendages on these ‘craft’ used for friction-environments like Earth’s atmosphere, but since UFOs prior to the CGI era have not needed them I don’t see why they would appear now.

Simon van Someren

London

Chinese from space

Napoleon said: “When all the Chinese people jump at the same time, the whole world will shake”. I am Chinese. The more I studied Chinese civilisation, the more I recognised its uniqueness, very different from those Indo-European cultures. I hereby give a shocking hypothesis about the origin of Chinese people: they developed from a hybrid of alien giants with early Earth people living in northern



China after a 300-year war with another alien species from the Nephilim, as mentioned in works by Zecharia Sitchin.

According to research by Van Flandern, an explosion of a missing planet between Mars and Jupiter occurred three million years ago, caused by the use of space plasma weapons. Dr Joseph Farrell postulated that there were intelligent humanlike beings on this planet. To cope with the higher gravity, they were of much larger size and with a heavier skeleton than Earthlings. The shape of a plasma ray was like a thunderbolt weapon in some ancient mythologies; the Greek God Zeus, the Hindu God Indra and the Babylonian God Ninurta each holds a divine thunderbolt weapon. However, I cannot find any similar one in Chinese mythology. My first guess is that the alien species that destroyed the planet were the ancestors of those people from the 12th planet in Sitchin’s works. During this interplanetary war, the Anunnaki ancestors did not conquer Earth. On the other hand, some of the surviving beings from the destroyed planet escaped to Earth, possibly landing in the regions near northern China such as Mongolia. Most importantly, this explosion triggered successive Ice Ages, which retarded evolutionary progress on Earth. These giant species continued to survive on Earth but they became smaller over time to cope, or used genetic engineering for adapting to the new living conditions. Anyway, they didn’t interfere with natural evolution on Earth. Another speculation was that they froze their bodies for a million years until the end of the Ice Ages.

About 450,000 years ago, the descendants of those species

destroyed giant aliens and came back from the 12th planet as described in Genesis. The Earth was still in an Ice Age. Giant aliens had inhabited the Earth for more than 2.5 million years. According to Sitchin, Sumerian texts state that these 12th planet aliens landed in the Middle East. I disagree and think that the so-called Aryans were indeed hybrids created by Nephilim aliens in the Arctic region. According to some esoteric texts and scientific research, the Aryans originated at the North Pole and later dispersed to India, Persia, North Africa and even Europe. These Aryans were nurtured by superbeings, possibly by 12th planet aliens. Strangely, these Aryans did not travel eastwards to China and East Asia. Why? Perhaps the Chinese mainland had already been guarded by giant aliens so that these Aryans found it difficult to conquer China. The Garden of Eden was only one of the episodes in the landing history. My version fits neatly with Sitchin’s theory.

According to recent research in north China and Siberia Oracle, an alien army enslaved ancient Chinese people to build the pyramids. In mural display, a group of beings dressed in leather armour, 12ft (3.6m) tall and red-haired, helped the people to fight those alien invaders. Also, Sitchin said northern China and Mongolia’s Gobi Desert encountered serious air pollution and nuclear war. (Prehistoric nuclear war in ancient India is another topic.) The invaders came from the 12th planet while the giant aliens were descendants surviving the cosmic war three million years ago.

Here are three related facts to support the alien origin of the Chinese people. In 1988, the first

DNA sample of an alien abduction case in Australia was sent for analysis. The result was surprising. The DNA structure resembles Chinese persons with black hair. Secondly, Chinese language is totally different from Indo-European languages; it is more akin to Mongolian. This suggests that Chinese people are not related to any bloodline of

Aryans.

The third piece of evidence was proposed by Chinese UFO researcher Lee Wai Tung. There were three very mysterious ancient texts that could not be attributed to any philosophical school like Confucianism or Taoism. They are *Book of Changes* (易经), *Inner Cannon of Hwangdi* (黄帝内经), and *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (山海经). *Inner Cannon* is the oldest source of traditional Chinese medicine. The acupuncture points and meridian system mentioned in the text are unique in the world, and were not developed from any philosophical schools in ancient China. The biological system underlying traditional Chinese medicine might be the knowledge inherited from alien species, according to Lee Wai Tung. Human intelligence could not have achieved such sophisticated knowledge about the human body in the ancient world.

Finally, I want to tell readers the mythological origin of the Chinese people. Most Chinese believe that the name of their ancestor is Fuxi (伏羲). His mother was a virgin. One day when his mother stepped into a big footstep left by the Thunder God, she became pregnant for 12 years before Fuxi was born. The Thunder God might be a giant alien while Fuxi was a hybrid made from genetic manipulation.

This hypothesis helps to explain why China has developed a totally different – and to a certain extent opposite – civilisation from Indo-Europeans. Are the 12th planet and the giant aliens fighting a proxy war on Earth by means of east-west rivalry? Who knows?

Hei Sing Tso

Hong Kong

First-hand accounts from *Fortean Times* readers and posters at forum.forteanimes.com

Spooky tailgater

Something occurred back in the 1980s that continues to baffle me. A friend – we'll call her Ruby – asked me to drive her and her stepdaughter to Melbourne Airport [in Florida] one night to catch a midnight flight to upstate New York. Since it was a nearly two-hour drive from Orlando to Melbourne, we left Orlando at 9:30pm as I made my way to US 1-92 – a highway that cuts across central Florida to the east coast. For miles there is nothing but cattle pasture and hillocks, occasionally traversed by high-voltage wires supported by tall towers.

It was a beautiful night and the stars were out and we had been on the road a little less than an hour when Ruby's stepdaughter – who was sitting in the back seat – said, "Greg, can you see anyone driving that car behind you?" I glanced up at the rear-view mirror and saw that a large, dark automobile was right on my bumper – my taillights reflecting on its hood (bonnet). The vehicle's headlights were not turned on but the interior light was and, sure enough – I could not see anyone behind the steering wheel! We marvelled at this enigma when the vehicle slinked back into the darkness and disappeared from sight. Five minutes later my backseat passenger said, "It's back!" Again, I looked up at the rear-view mirror and the automobile seemed glued to my bumper! Its headlights were still turned off but the interior light was on and we still could see no one behind the steering wheel.

"Alright girls", I said as I accelerated. "Lock your doors". I gunned the engine and the big, black vehicle stayed right on my tail as if it were attached to my bumper. Then it once again slinked back into the darkness and disappeared. This was before cellphones were in vogue and here I was out in the middle of nowhere, late at night with two frightened women playing cat-and-mouse with a phantom vehicle. We didn't see it for about 15 minutes and were just beginning to calm down when all of a sudden – *Boo!* – the headlights of the phantom vehicle came on right behind us, causing all three of us to scream in unison. Ruby had just lit a cigarette and it fell out of her mouth and her stepdaughter began to cry.

Again I put the 'pedal to the metal' as I flew along the Florida country back-road pursued by the vehicle that seemed to be attached to the back of my car. Then, as suddenly as it appeared it extinguished its headlights and disappeared into the black of the night. When we arrived at Melbourne Airport all three of



us headed straight to the cocktail lounge and ordered a good, stiff drink. After seeing the women onto their plane, I now had to make the drive back to Orlando by myself so I chose another route.

I still can't make sense of this experience. Could the driver have been experiencing electrical problems within the vehicle and was using my car's taillights to stay on the road? The next day I told my brother – who trains emergency medical personnel – of this unnerving experience and he told me that stretch of road has seen many deadly automobile accidents and is considered a 'haunted highway'.

Greg May
Orlando, Florida

Flung rosary

In 2000 a spirit entered my moving car and complained about my taste in religious symbols – that's the best explanation I heard, anyway. I live in San Pedro, California, the harbour area of Los Angeles. There is a local Southern California custom of hanging a Catholic rosary from the car's rear-view mirror. This may be down to the fact that the Church has declared that Saint Christopher never actually existed, so we no longer affix St Christopher medallions to the visor.

A rosary forms a loop about 10in (25cm) round, but is not a necklace so has no clasp. To hang it from a mirror, one holds it sideways, passes it along the width of the mirror, and it then hangs down from the mounting post. Once there it hangs securely from the post behind the mirror, usually with the crucifix part hanging straight down, but sometimes swaying a bit

from the car's motion.

I was driving alone in a remote area of Joshua Tree, which is a huge National Park in the southwest portion of the Mojave Desert. Rock fans of course are familiar with the U2 album about the Tree, and the fact that Gram Parsons OD'd there, memorialised in the Stones' ode *Wild Horses*. It was just fully dark. I had been out on the desert floor for some time, taking sunset photographs with the trees silhouetted. I had not seen any other people or cars for hours. I was driving slowly, about 30mph (48km/h). The road took me uphill, and then around a constant radius left turn with the road banked somewhat. I held the wheel to the left, leaning into the curve. In the US the driver sits on the left. Due to the turn, the rosary swung to the right, then hung steady at about the four o'clock position. I

was thinking that it was odd to see it angled like that, and was shifting my focus to the rosary for a few seconds, then to the roadway for a few seconds, back and forth, as the rosary stayed tilted at about four.

While I was looking directly at the rosary, it suddenly flew off the mirror and clattered to the passenger side floor – at least as much as a rosary weighing a few ounces can clatter. I followed its path, looking directly at it, and noticed it even bounced a bit off the floor mat. With the hair on the back of my neck standing up, I leaned over to grab it and clutched it in my right hand. Without stopping the car, I looked up again at the mirror, but it was still properly affixed on the post, which was securely mounted to the windshield.

I kept driving for a few miles, till I figured I was away from whatever or whoever had snatched and flung the rosary, then pulled over. The mirror was still in place and the rosary intact. The only conclusion I could make was the rosary had passed through the mirror post and been thrown to the floor.

I mentioned the incident to my friend Sofia, who comes from a Mexican family (Indian as opposed to Spanish background, as she is very proud of the distinction). She scoffed and said, "Oh Marcos, that's no big thing. You had an Indian spirit riding in your car who didn't like the missionaries. A lot of times the missionaries were mean to the Indians. He got mad at your rosary and threw it down." I am aware the missionaries were sometimes less than kind to some of the natives, but the mission period in Alta California was around 1770 to 1860... Still, Sofia's is the best explanation I've heard.

Mark J Willis
By email

POLICE THE ILLUSTRATED NEWS

LAW COURTS AND WEEKLY RECORD

JAN BONDESON presents more stories from the "worst newspaper in England" – the *Illustrated Police News*.

48. LIVELY GOINGS ON AT A TRANCE SHOW

'Professor' Mark Moores was a phrenologist and mesmerist who kept the Phrenological Museum in Morecambe. His son Harry Moores, born in 1868, also became a mesmerist and hypnotist. When still a teenager, he started performing in the provinces, hypnotising volunteers from the audience, to considerable acclaim. He used the stage names 'Professor Leon Vint', 'Dr Dexter Vint', and 'Oubas the Mysterious' interchangeably. In December 1891, when he was performing in Wolverhampton, the Town Clerk prosecuted him before the local magistrates, alleging that his hypnotism was a complete fraud and that the 'volunteers' were in fact men in his employ. And indeed, a witness had been struck by the fact that the same 'volunteers' appeared on stage at several different performances and that they were seen laughing and joking together as if they knew each other. Although the phrenologist Mark Moores and the Baptist minister of Bury acted as character witnesses, and although several people who had been hypnotised by young Moores swore that they were not in his employ, he was found guilty of

unlawfully using pretended hypnotism and mesmerism to deceive and impose upon Her Majesty's subjects. He was fined a total of £5 5s., and had to pay in excess of £19 costs, or face three months in prison.

After this hard blow to his budding career, Leon Vint, as he henceforth called himself, toured the provinces for several years. It was not until October 1896 that he next made the news, again unfortunately for all the wrong reasons. At this time, he was performing in Chester, with an act that involved his assistant being put in a trance on a Monday, to be woken up on Saturday night. The assistant, dressed only in a nightshirt, was sleeping in a coffin. The problem was that Leon Vint had promised that the local medical men, and any other interested parties, would be allowed to witness the trance and satisfy themselves that no fraud was involved. A number of local roughs took him up on this offer, bringing a bottle of whisky and a pack of cards to amuse themselves in the room with the coffin. After they had stuck pins into the sleeping man and burnt his nose with a cigar, he was miraculously 'cured' of his trance: he leapt out of the coffin, and struck out at his tormentors, challenging the shortest of them to a fight. One of the tallest and stoutest of the rowdy visitors instead accepted the

challenge, but then 'Professor' Vint came dashing into the room, threatening him with a revolver! If a police constable had not arrived to calm things down, some nasty scenes might have ensued, but once he saw the constable, the 'corpse' jumped back into the coffin and resumed his 'trance'.

These undignified scenes in Chester were discussed in many newspapers, the *Illustrated Police News* adding a hilarious illustration of the nightshirted man and the coffin. The foolhardy 'Professor' managed to explain that the revolver he had been waving around was only a cigar-cutter in the shape of a revolver! A *Cheshire Observer* journalist had been knocked on the head by a ruffian in Vint's employ at some stage of the uproar, and the 'Professor' was taken to court again, this time being fined £12 and costs. In spite of the Chester fiasco, he continued as a showman, although trance shows were strictly avoided: instead, he employed a 20-strong female choir and a pianoforte player in his grand 'Globe Choir and Scenorama' that toured the provincial music halls and mechanics' institutes. As the choir performed, Leon Vint exhibited a series of moving and panoramic pictures, and 'Madame Vint' showed her clairvoyant talents in a séance. Vint's Globe Choir and Scenorama was particularly popular in Wales, where he struck a chord

with the labouring men in the valleys. In 1912, he rented the Nuneaton Theatre and reopened it as Vint's Electric Theatre, but according to the Stage Year Book for 1919, he was back in London by that time.

The popularity of the cinema meant that such unambitious theatrical performances became a thing of the past, too old-fashioned even for the most backward Welsh valleys, and 'Professor' Leon Vint, who had once become notorious for the lively goings-on at his trance show, died in obscurity in 1943.



ABOVE: Lively goings-on at Professor Vint's trance show, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 10 October 1896.

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Rachel Dove, West Yorkshire.



"My total earnings so far are £2,500."

Victor Wright, West Midlands



"I have been publishing my own niche website for circus critique. This work has led to recognition in my field, with work offers ranging from writing book reviews for scholarly journals to running master classes for young people. I have had two paid writing residencies at festivals this year and have been employed to write tweets. Payments total £2575, plus expenses for travel, tickets to events and payments in kind in the form of review copy books."

Katherine Kavanagh, West Midlands



"As a result of my cricket articles, I have been elected into The Cricket Writers Club – an organisation that counts experienced journalists among its members. One of the perks of this membership is a press card that gives me entry into all of England's cricket stadium press boxes."

Martin Read, West Sussex



"I've been published in The Guardian and Good Life earning £400. And now I've got my first book published by Bloomsbury called MOB Rule: Lessons Learned by a Mother of Boys."

The Writers Bureau course provided me with structure, stopped my procrastination but most importantly it provided the impetus to try something different."

Hannah Evans, Winchester



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Why Fortean?



Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature

of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox.

FT toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX

FAUST Part 4

HUNT EMERSON & KEVIN JACKSON

THE 24 YEARS OF THE DEVILISH PACT WERE RUNNING OUT! FAUST WAS NOW THE MOST FAMOUS MAGICIAN IN THE WORLD, AND HE WAS JEALOUS OF HIS COMPETITORS...

I HATE THEM! I HATE THEM ALL!

...SUCH AS THE GROUP OF FOUR MERRY SORCERERS WHO WOULD CHOP EACH OTHERS' HEADS OFF AND THEN SPRING BACK TO LIFE!

HUP! HEY! HEY! HUP! HUP! HEY!

FAUSTUS SOON PUT A STOP TO THAT!

TO FIGHT HIS GROWING DEPRESSION AND LONELINESS, FAUSTUS SUMMONED UP HELEN OF TROY AGAIN...

WHAT DO YOU WANT NOW? YOU GOT ANY SHIPS YOU WANT LAUNCHING?

...er... NOT EXACTLY...

SHE BORE HIM A SON - JUSTUS...

COOTCHIE COO!!

BUT HE COULD NOT ESCAPE HIS DOOM! ON THE NIGHT BEFORE HIS DEBT FELL DUE, HE SUMMONED ALL HIS STUDENTS TO AN INN...

SUDDENLY, THE INN WAS BLASTED WITH A TERRIBLE WIND!!

BURP!

THE AIR WAS FILLED WITH SERPENTS, WHO PLAYED STRANGE MUSIC!!

THE STUDENTS FLED!!

CRASH THUMP BANG WALL-OP CRUNT KAPOO WHAM

WHEN DAWN CAME, THEY CREPT BACK IN...

THEY FOUND THE HORRIBLY MUTILATED BODY OF FAUSTUS OUTSIDE ON THE DUNG HEAP, STILL TWITCHING AS HIS LIFE EBBED AWAY...

dun

AND HIS SOUL?

SHOULDA READ THE SMALL PRINT, SUCKER...

COMING NEXT MONTH



HAUNTED HOLIDAYS

THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF THE
ISLE OF WIGHT



GOTHIC GETAWAY

A LONG STRANGE SUMMER AT
THE VILLA DEODATI



OLMPYIAN ODDITIES,
FUNERAL MUSEUM,
NORTHERN WEIRDNESS,
AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 343

ON SALE 21 JULY 2016

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



At 10.45am on 12 December 2015, a foul Saturday morning, a passing cyclist found the body of a smartly dressed man lying face up, arms by his side, on the bleak slope of Indian's Head on Saddleworth Moor in the South Pennines (notorious as the burial site of four victims murdered by Ian Brady and Myra Hindley in the 1960s). The man was close to 6ft (1.8m) tall, aged between 65 and 75, fair-skinned with blue eyes and receding grey hair. In his pockets were 13 ten-pound notes, three train tickets (including a return ticket to London) and an empty vial of thyroxine sodium (a harmless drug used to treat underactive thyroid glands) with a label written in Urdu.

Nearly six months later, police have yet to identify him, but they have taken to calling him "Neil Dovestone" after the Dovestone Reservoir, above which his body was found. CCTV had caught him taking a tube train from Ealing Broadway in London on 11 December. At Euston he bought a return ticket to Manchester, whence he took another train to the village of Greenfield 15 miles (24km) away on the edge of the Peak District. At 2pm he walked into the Clarence Hotel in Greenfield and asked landlord Mel Robinson in a polite, placeless accent for directions to the "top of the mountain". Despite being warned it would soon be dark, he set off towards the hills overlooked by the towering 1,500ft (4,600m) rock formation called Wimbury Stones, known locally as Indian's Head. Two witnesses saw him at 4.30pm, about three quarters of the way up, as darkness rolled in and temperatures plunged.

A post mortem examination found he had a titanium plate fitted to his left femur, which at one point had been badly broken. This was traced to a company called True Dynamic based in Faisalabad, Pakistan. Meticulous detective work has narrowed the list of possible candidates to 1,750 patients in 15 Pakistani hospitals. On 15 March, a toxicology report showed the man had taken strychnine, a deadly poison banned in Europe and the Americas but available to buy over the counter in Pakistan. Two days later, the police announced that the ostensibly harmless medicine bottle had contained strychnine. Traces of the drug Reserpine – banned in Britain but used in some countries to treat high blood pressure – were also found in the man's blood. The police initially reported that he was Caucasian, but now think he may be a Pashtun from northwestern Pakistan, an ethnic group who often have fair skin and blue eyes. Why he chose to die on a remote English hillside remains an utter mystery. *Eve. Standard*, 22 Jan, 14 Mar; *Guardian*, 27+28 Jan; *Sunday Telegraph*, 20 Mar 2016.

A woman's body was found inside a lift (elevator in US) in China a month after it was switched off. It was in an apartment block in the northwestern city of Xi'an (famed for its entombed terra-cotta warriors). The woman's hands were injured from what appeared to be attempts to force the door open, and scratches were found inside the lift, one of two inside the building. She had probably died from dehydration. Two maintenance workers

turned off the lift on 30 January, and the body was found when other workers arrived on 1 March. It is believed the woman, only identified by the last name Wu, was 43 years old and lived by herself on the 15th floor of the building. Local media reports portrayed her as mentally ill and said that her family believed she had just got lost somewhere. They had reported her missing but did not take further steps to determine her whereabouts. The workers had been called to fix a fault with the lift, found it stuck between the 10th and 11th floors, shouted to see if anyone was inside, and – when no one answered – cut the power. Their failure to check properly amounted to "gross negligence", government officials said. The building was left vacant for a month due to observance and celebration of the Chinese New Year. Police treated the death as involuntary manslaughter and several arrests were made. *BBC News*, *jezebel.com*, 6 Mar; *NY Times*, (*London*) *Times*, 7 Mar 2016.

Police were called to the River Wandle in Wimbledon, southwest London, in June 2010, and pulled a headless body from the water. Following procedure, they summoned a doctor to declare the man was "life extinct". At the inquest in November 2011, coroner Shirley Radcliffe asked: "Even though there was no head, you had to call [a doctor] in?" Det. Insp. Chuk Gwams replied: "Yes, Ma'am. They are the experts. We are not." *Adelaide Advertiser*, 23 Nov 2011.

A vet taking a selfie in front of an elephant was trampled to death. Octavia Warahapsari, 25, who worked for the Indonesian tourist centre where the attack happened, fled when the animal charged her, dropping her mobile phone; but when she turned back to retrieve it, the Sumatran elephant caught her in its trunk, hurled her to the ground and trampled her. She died of severe injuries. (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph*, 13 May 2016.

Suharto Dimjati, 48, died when a cow he was slaughtering in a sacrificial ceremony suddenly kicked out, making him stab his own arm. He severed an artery, suffered severe blood loss, and died on the way to hospital after the accident at a Muslim festival in Taman Cahaya Baru, a township in Malaysia's Johor state. His family said he had been proud to be given the honour of sacrificing the cow. *Metro*, 1 Oct 2015.

Indonesian pop star Irma Bule, 29, kept performing for 45 minutes in Karawang despite being bitten by a cobra that was part of her stage act. She often used reptiles during her stage shows. Though the snake had not been de-fanged, she showed no immediate signs of illness and refused an offer of anti-venom. She later began to vomit and have seizures before being rushed to hospital, where she was pronounced dead on 4 April. "In the middle of the second song, Irma stepped on the snake's tail before it bit her on the thigh," said a member of the audience. *D.Telegraph*, 8 April 2016.



HIDDEN MASTERS

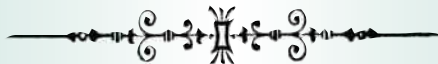
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